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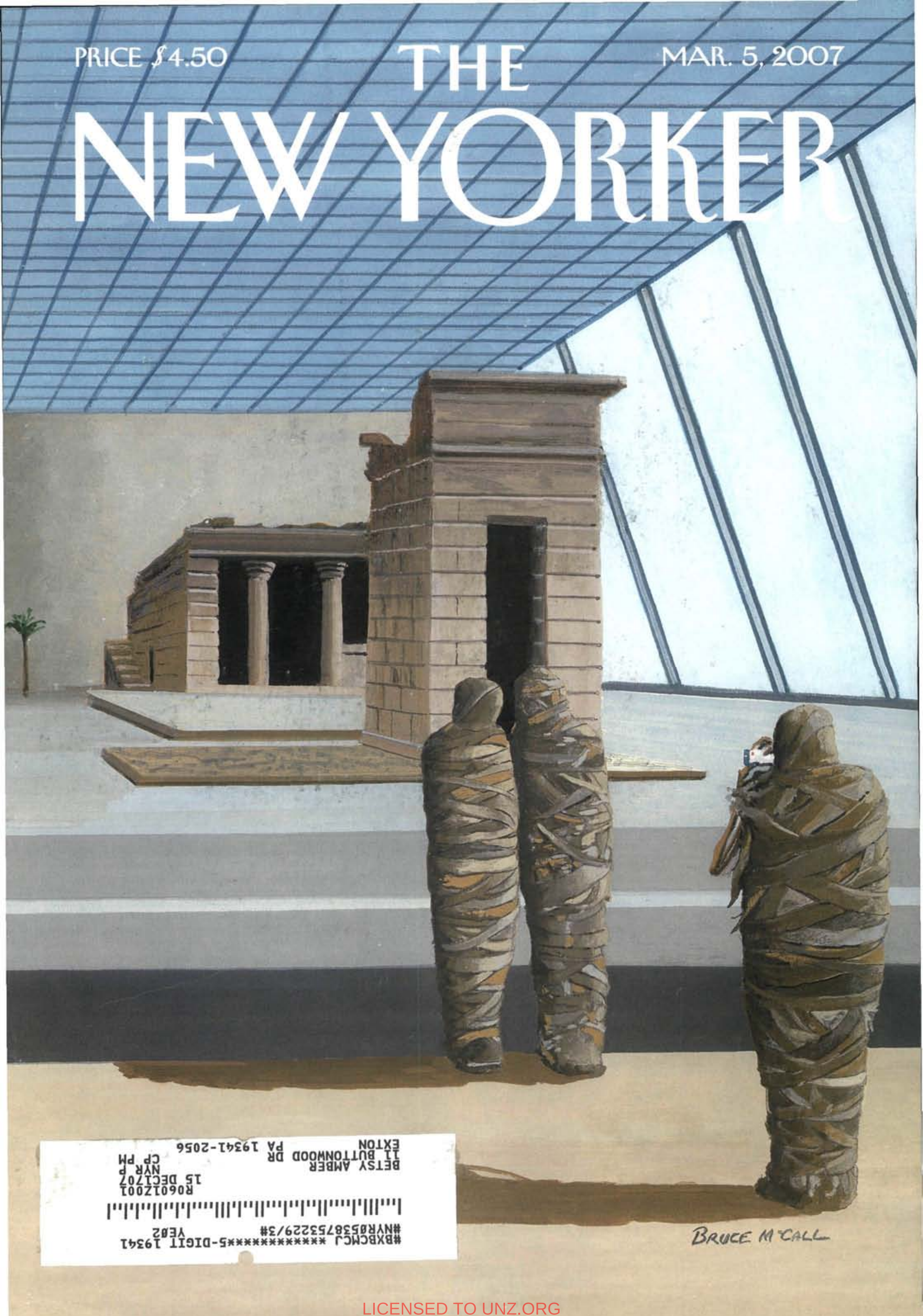

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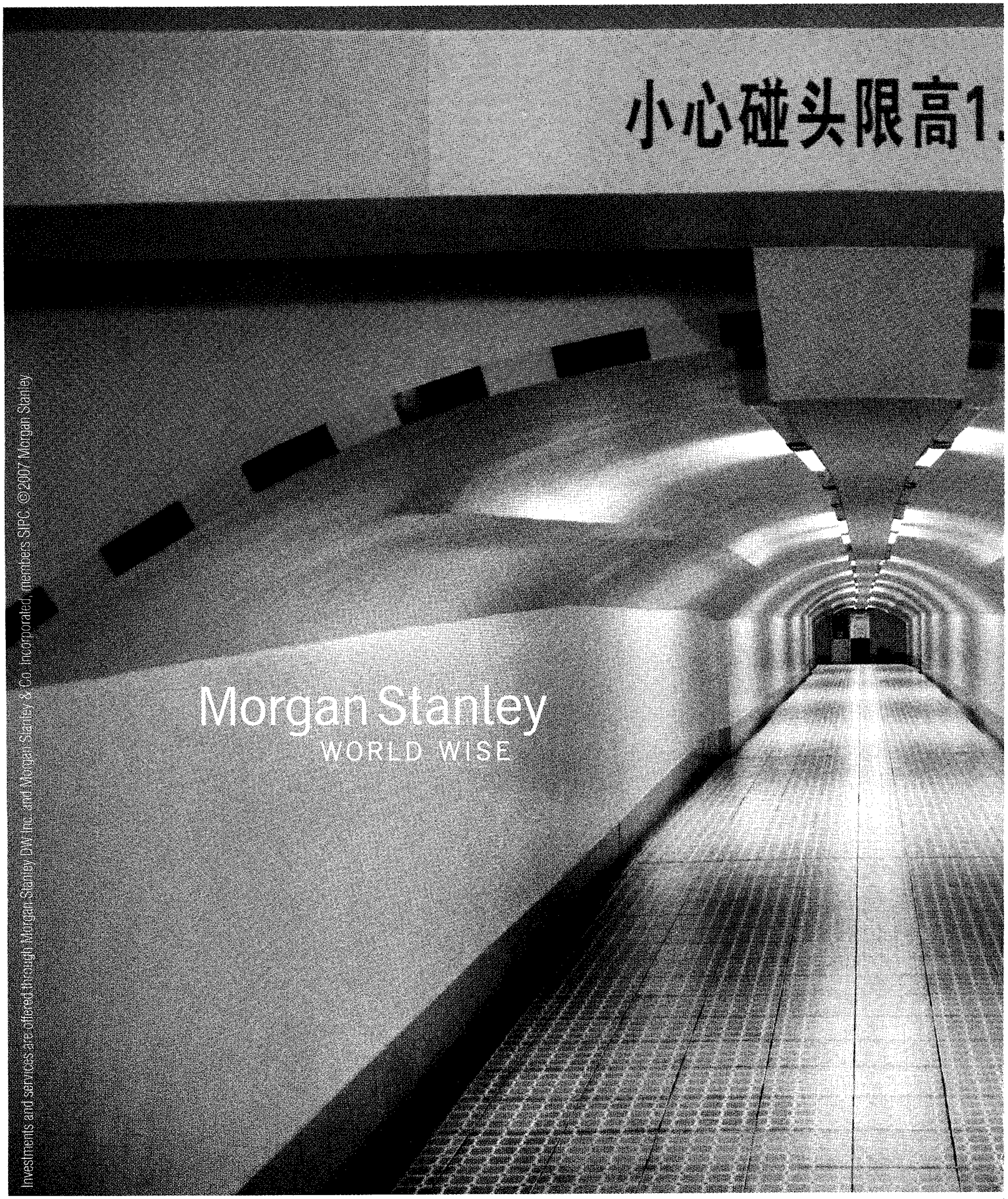
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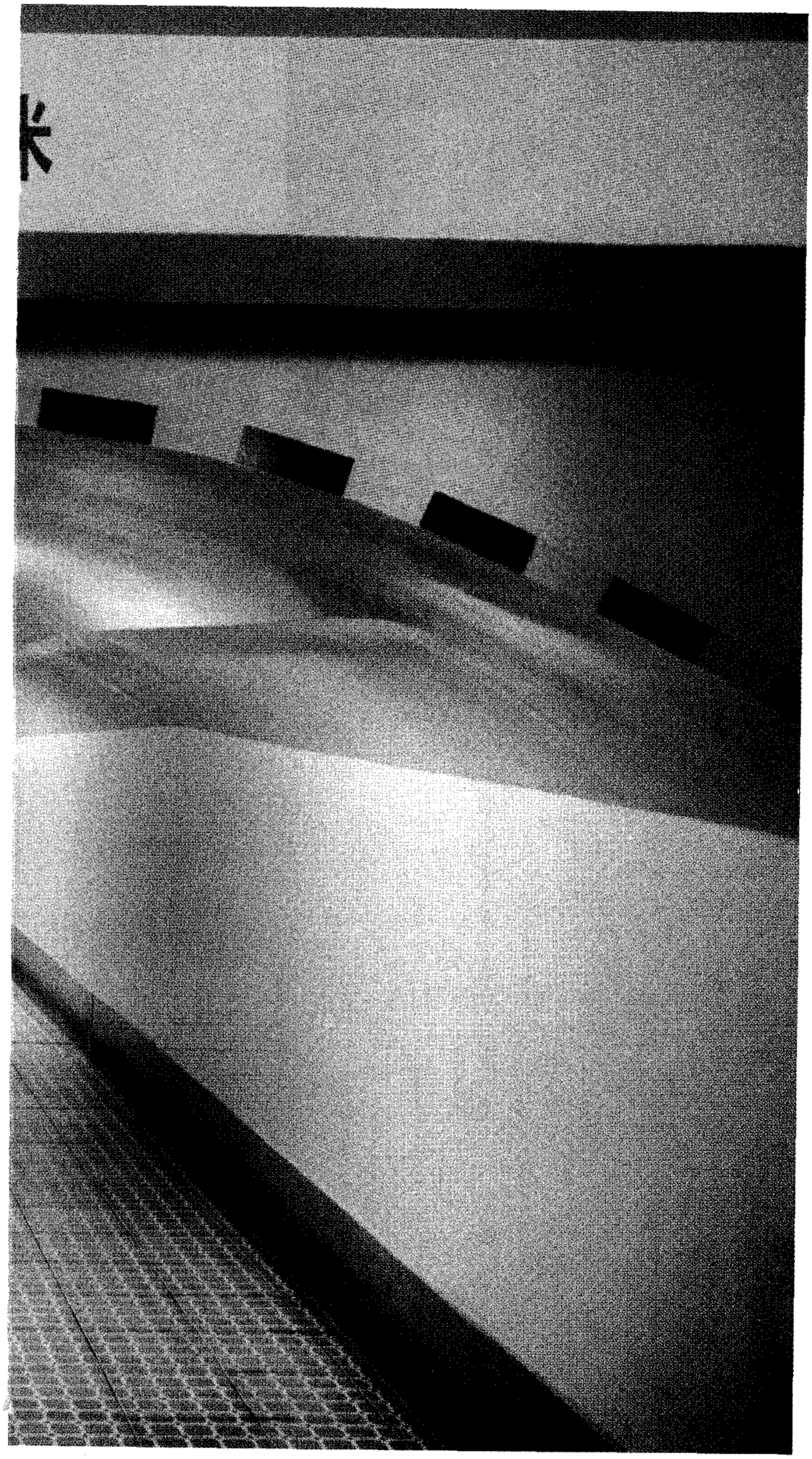

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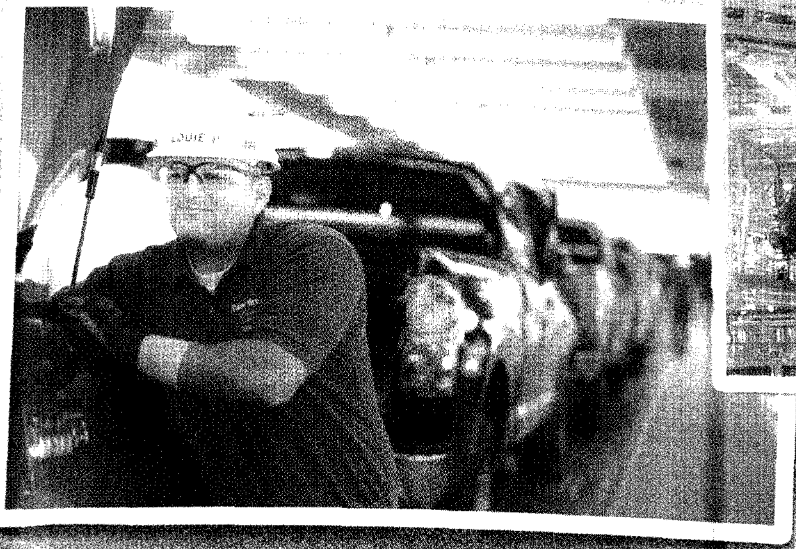

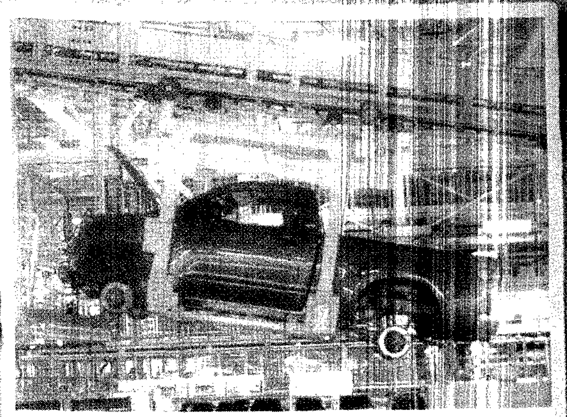

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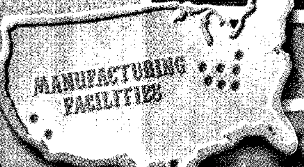

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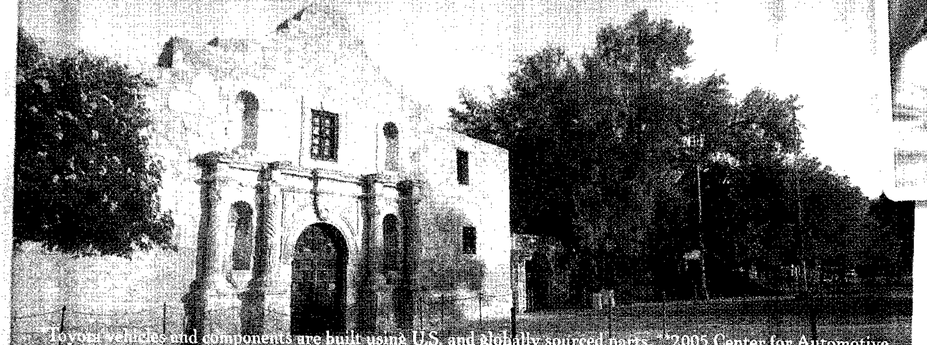

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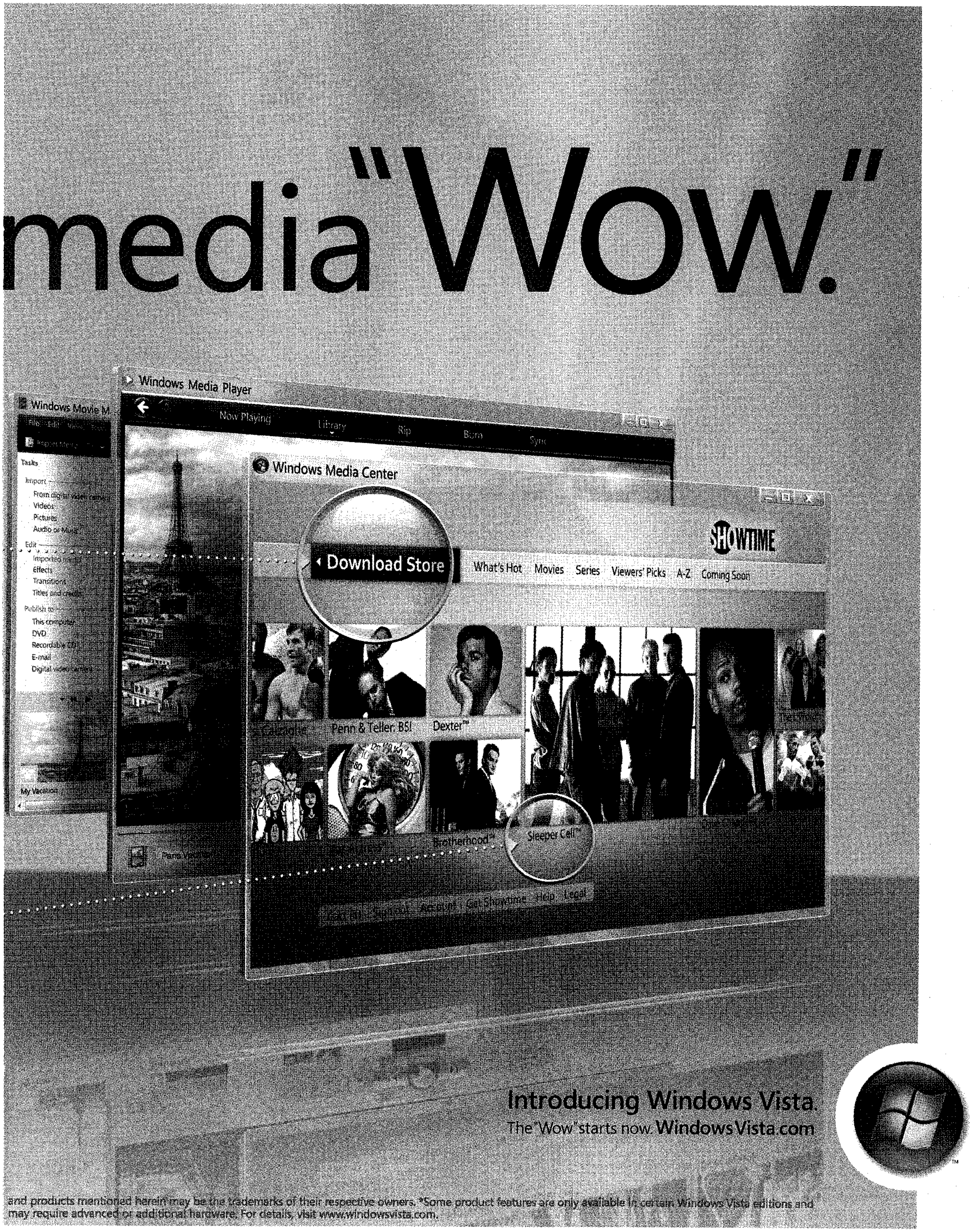
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MARCH 5, 2007

12 GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

33 THE TALK OF THE TOWN
David Remnick on Al Gore; reading Spalding Gray; restaurant beef.

Deborah Copaken Kogan 38 PERSONAL HISTORY
Stage Motherhood
Making Sundance with an eleven-year-old.

Orhan Pamuk 44 TURKISH JOURNAL
The View
What is it like to be a dog?

Elsa Walsh 46 DEPT. OF LAW ENFORCEMENT
Miami Blue
The personal toll on a top cop.

Seymour M. Hersh 54 ANNALS OF NATIONAL SECURITY
The Redirection
Does the new policy benefit the real enemy?

Eugene de Salignac, Michelle Preston 60 PHOTOGRAPH
Above Town

Burkhard Bilger 66 A REPORTER AT LARGE
Spider Woman
Hunting venomous pests in L.A.

Steven Millhauser 74 FICTION
"History of a Disturbance"

THE CRITICS

David Denby 80 A CRITIC AT LARGE
The new non-narrative movies.

BOOKS

85 Briefly Noted

Peter Schjeldahl 86 THE ART WORLD
Two Jeff Wall shows.

Alex Ross 88 MUSICAL EVENTS
"Mahagonny," "The Grapes of Wrath."

Simon Schama 90 AT THE MUSEUMS
George Stubbs at the Frick.

John Lahr 92 THE THEATRE
"Mary Rose," "Salvage."

David Denby 94 THE CURRENT CINEMA
"Amazing Grace."

POEMS

W. S. Merwin 52 "A Letter to Su T'ung Po"
Brenda Hillman 70 "Phone Booth"

COVER *"Say Cheese," by Bruce McCall* DRAWINGS *Tom Cheney, Glen Le Lievre, Kim Warp, Harry Bliss, Paul Noth, Bruce Eric Kaplan, Sam Gross, P. C. Vey, William Haefeli, Michael Maslin, Drew Dernavich, Robert Mankoff, Zachary Kanin, Erik Hilgerdt* SPOTS *Philippe Petit-Roulet*

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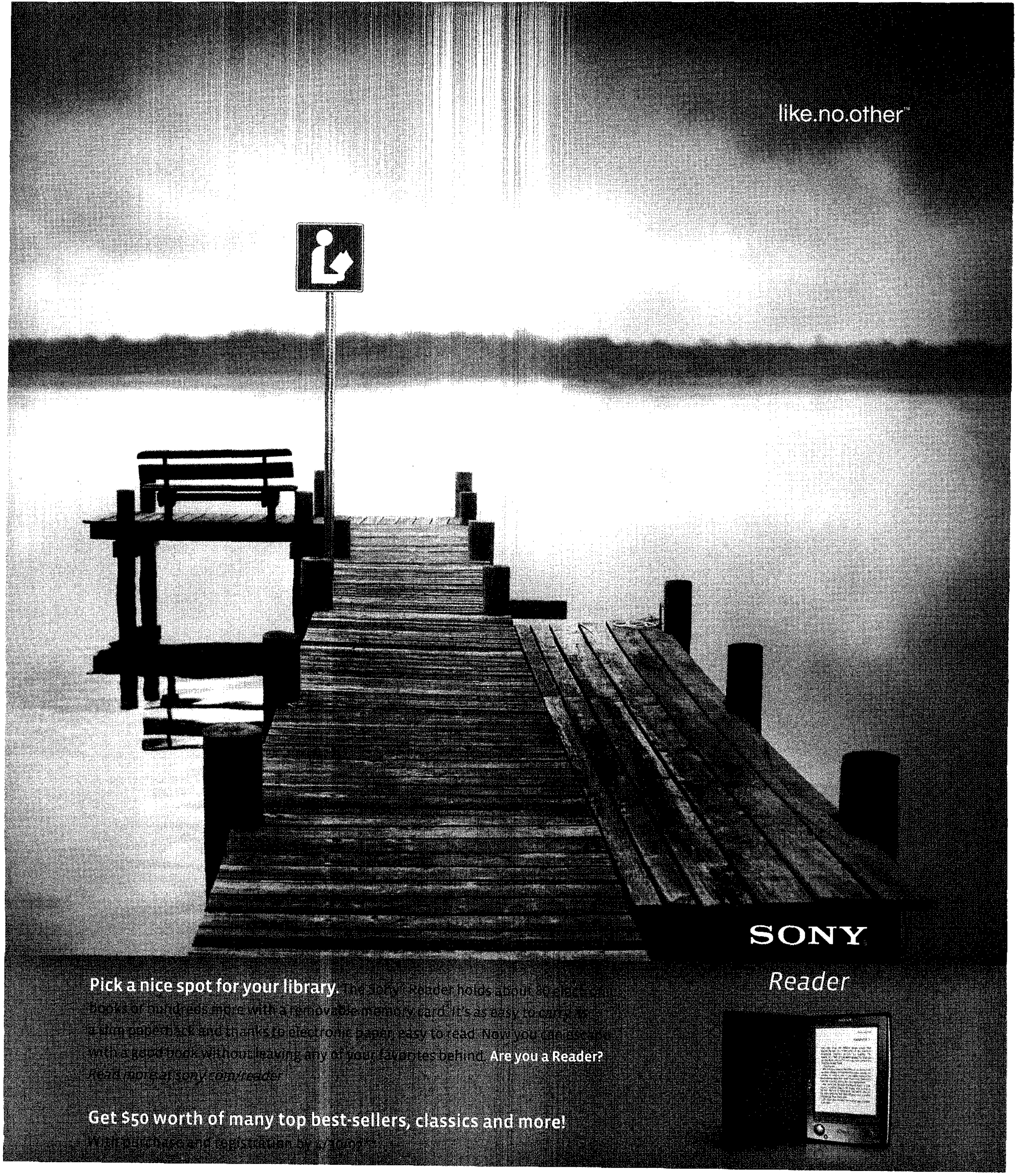

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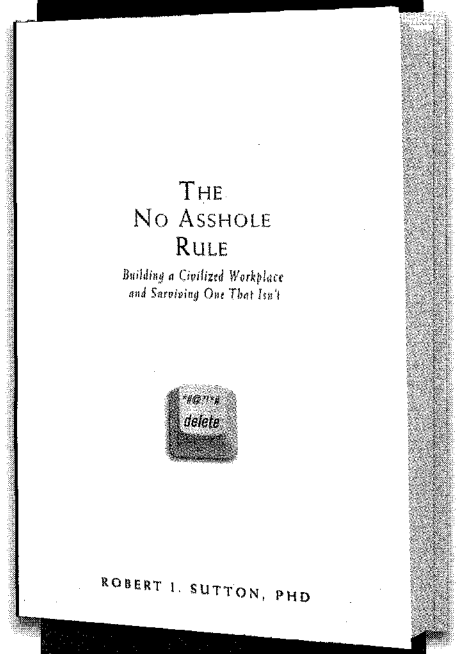

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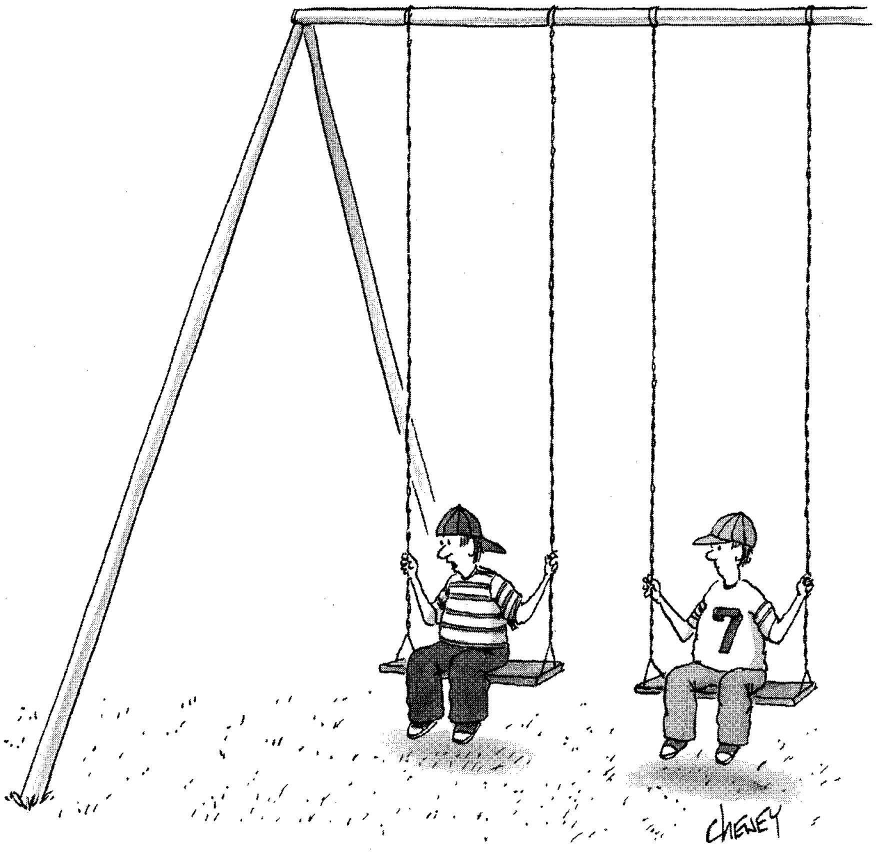
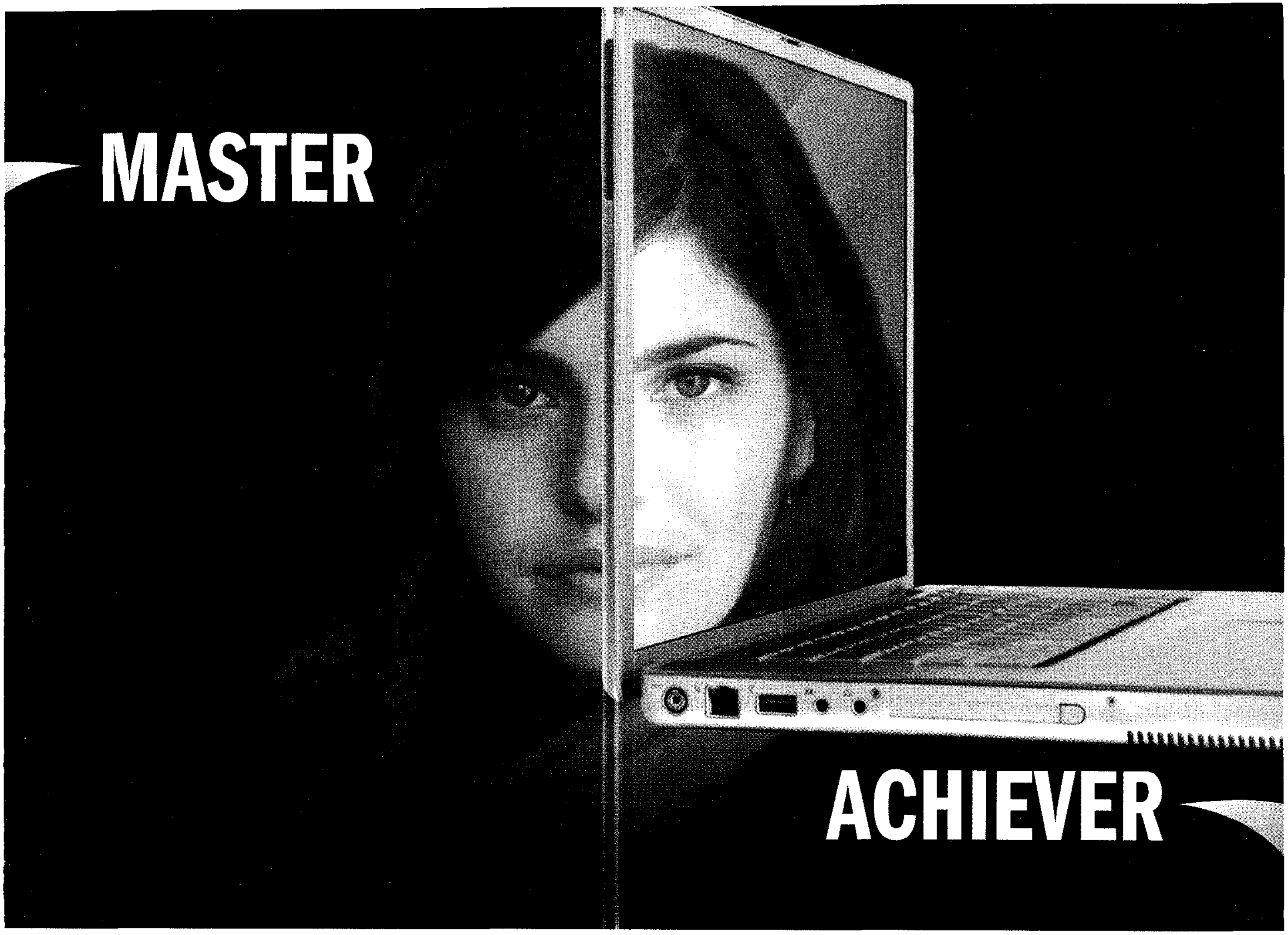
Simon Schama (At the Museums, p. 90) is a professor of history and art history at Columbia. His eight-part series "The Power of Art" will air on PBS in June. ♦



"I wanted to be an astronaut, too, until I found out about the diaper thing."



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SAVING LIVES

Jerome Groopman's essay on how doctors think is an intriguing and honest description of the complex thought and decision-making processes that go into medical diagnosis ("What's the Trouble?," January 29th). With the benefit of hindsight, I would add another piece to the puzzle: the patient himself. In this case, Evan McKinley had chest pains but was sent home and later suffered a heart attack. He was described as fit, athletic, happy with family and work, and used to outdoor activity. When a patient like this is worried, the physician should be worried, too. History-taking and communication skills should be developed, but physicians must also fully engage the patient and be able to listen and attend to his or her story on many different levels.

Karen M. Glaser
Associate Dean for Academic Affairs
Jefferson Medical College
Philadelphia, Pa.

In Groopman's article, an active, healthy man presented with atypical chest discomfort but no risk factors, normal physical findings, and normal lab work. Although the emergency-room doctor who treated him, Pat Croskerry, may have missed a diagnosis of unstable angina, he made a reasoned diagnosis appropriate to the available information. In evaluating a doctor's diagnosis, one should also take into account the denominator: the vast numbers of patients who describe to their physicians equally atypical symptoms, which, in the final analysis, are of no clinical consequence. These patients should not all be admitted to the hospital, nor should they all be subjected to expensive, invasive, and potentially harmful diagnostic procedures. Physicians must often make life-and-death decisions in limited time frames based on incomplete and frequently misleading information. Occasionally, the best analysis of available information leads to the wrong diagnosis. This is a reality of medical practice and it does not always demonstrate flawed thinking.

Timothy C. Howland, M.D.
Vestal, N.Y.

EDITORS' NOTE: The July 31, 2006, piece on Wikipedia, "Know It All," by Stacy Schiff, contained an interview with a Wikipedia site administrator and contributor called Essjay, whose responsibilities included handling disagreements about the accuracy of the site's articles and taking action against users who violate site policy. He was described in the piece as "a tenured professor of religion at a private university" with "a Ph.D. in theology and a degree in canon law."

Essjay was recommended to Ms. Schiff as a source by a member of Wikipedia's management team because of his respected position within the Wikipedia community. He was willing to describe his work as a Wikipedia administrator but would not identify himself other than by confirming the biographical details that appeared on his user page. At the time of publication, neither we nor Wikipedia knew Essjay's real name. Essjay's entire Wikipedia life was conducted with only a user name; anonymity is common for Wikipedia administrators and contributors, and he says that he feared personal retribution from those he had ruled against online. Essjay now says that his real name is Ryan Jordan, that he is twenty-four and holds no advanced degrees, and that he has never taught. He was recently hired by Wikia—a for-profit company affiliated with Wikipedia—as a "community manager"; he continues to hold his Wikipedia positions. He did not answer a message we sent to him; Jimmy Wales, the co-founder of Wikia and of Wikipedia, said of Essjay's invented persona, "I regard it as a pseudonym and I don't really have a problem with it."

•

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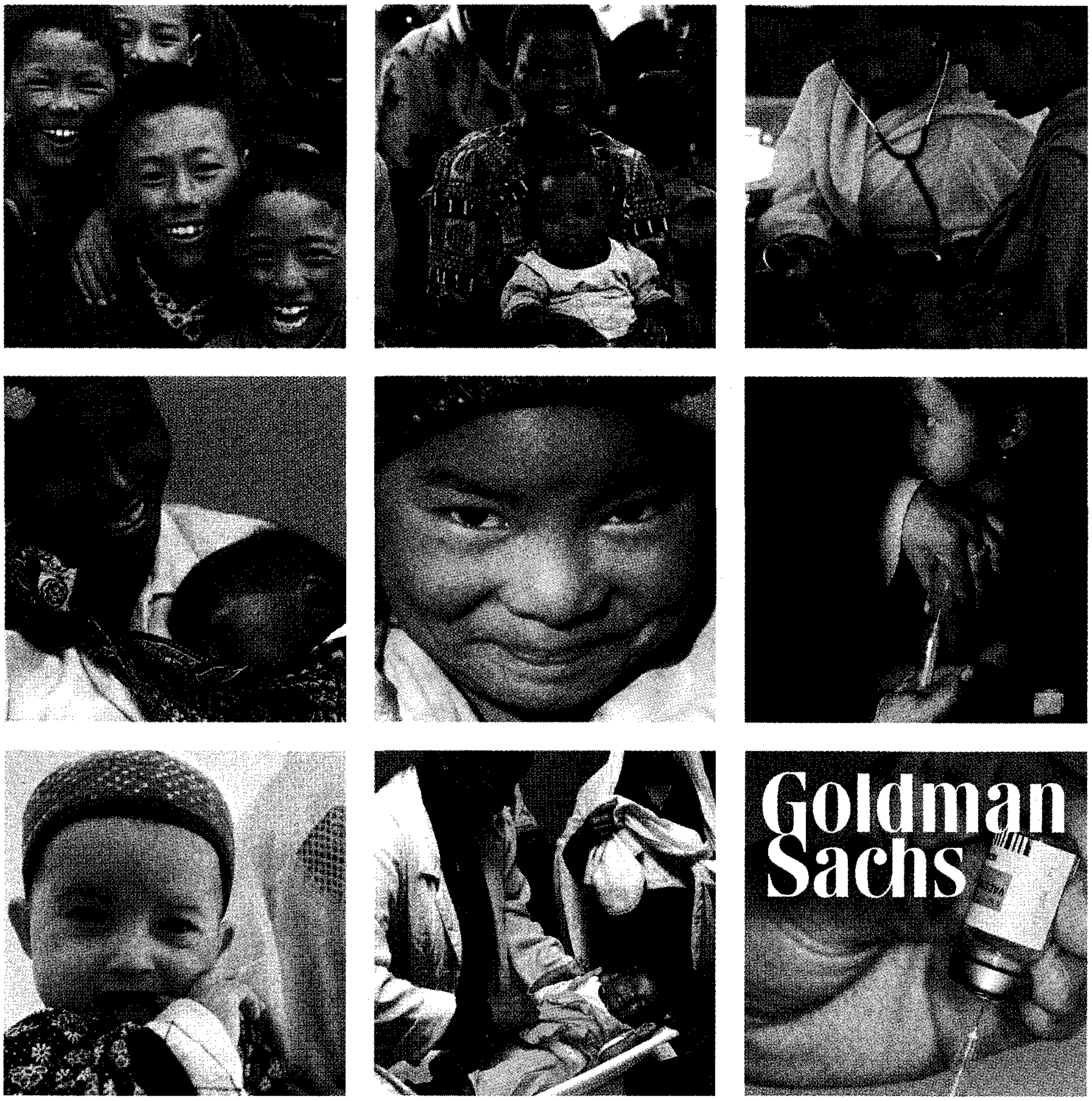

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Judy Collins, who is currently making her cabaret début at the Café Carlyle. Photograph by Yola Monakhov.

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

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THIS WEEK

THE THEATRE
A WOMAN GRIEVES

Joan Didion's memoir "The Year of Magical Thinking" chronicled the period following the death of her husband, John Gregory Dunne, and during the hospitalization of her daughter, Quintana. It was the producer Scott Rudin's idea to turn the book into a one-woman play. Didion's adaptation, directed by David Hare and starring Vanessa Redgrave, will have a twenty-four-week run at the Booth, marking the author's first foray into the theatre. (See page 14.)

NIGHT LIFE
LOOKING BACK

For two decades, the Knitting Factory has been a downtown hub for the local music scene. This week, its founder, Michael Dorf, who left the club five years ago but maintains a relationship, gathers Lou Reed, Laurie Anderson, Mike Doughty, Marc Ribot, and a number of other acts for a twentieth-anniversary celebration at Town Hall. (See page 16.)

DANCE
LOVE AND LOSS

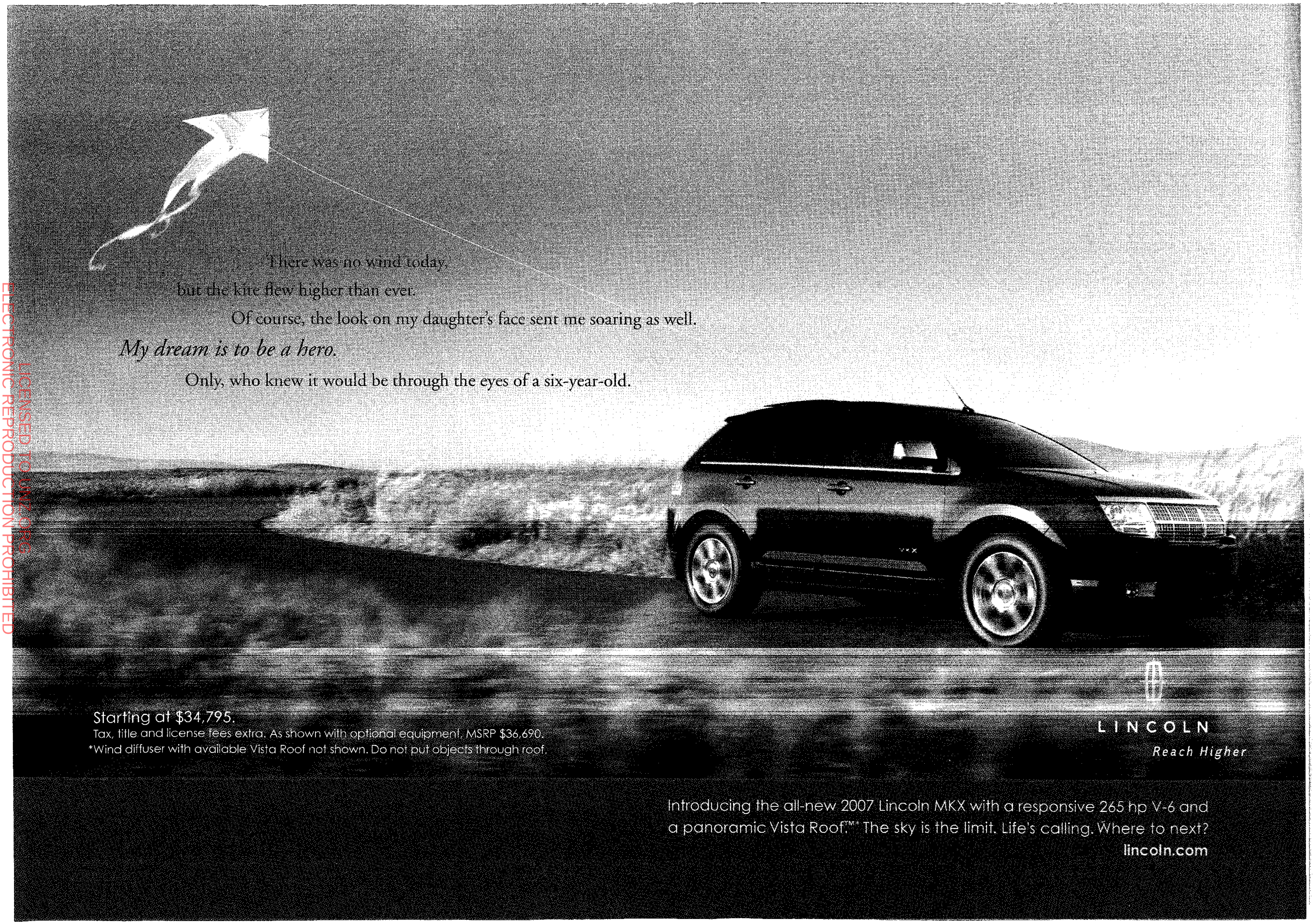
The Paul Taylor Dance Company's City Center season includes Taylor's lighthearted take on Shakespeare's "Troilus and Cressida" (a New York première) and "Lines of Loss," a moody new work set to music ranging from Machaut to John Cage. (See page 20.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
SHIP AHOY

Programming has been generally conservative at City Opera this season. Eager for a hit, the company begins its spring schedule with a new production of Gilbert and Sullivan's "Pirates of Penzance" that features the Broadway star Marc Kudisch. (See page 22.)

MOVIES
JAPAN NOIR

The title of BAM's monthlong retrospective of films by Shohei Imamura, who died in 2006, is "Pimps, Prostitutes, and Pigs." It suggests the dark and seamy subjects that appealed to the director, who began his career as an assistant to Yasujiro Ozu in postwar Japan. The series begins with a weeklong run of "Vengeance Is Mine," from 1979, about a remorseless serial killer. (See page 26.)



There was no wind today,
but the kite flew higher than ever.
Of course, the look on my daughter's face sent me soaring as well.
My dream is to be a hero.
Only, who knew it would be through the eyes of a six-year-old.

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THE THEATRE

OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

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THE ATTIC
Yoji Sakate's play is based on the Japanese social phenomenon of *hikikomori*, in which adolescents choose to live in extreme isolation. In previews. Opens March 4. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

BE
The Tel Aviv-based group Mayumana performs a new stage spectacle, a kinetic blend of movement, theatre, and percussion. In previews. (Union Square Theatre, 100 E. 17th St. 212-505-0700.)

BILL W. AND DR. BOB
The story of Bill Wilson and Bob Smith, the stockbroker and the surgeon who founded Alcoholics Anonymous. In previews. Opens March 5. (New World Stages, 340 W. 50th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE CAVE DWELLERS
William Saroyan's 1957 drama is about a group of outcasts who create a second home in a rundown theatre. In previews. Opens March 4. (Pearl, 80 St. Marks Pl. 212-598-9802.)

CHICKEN
Michael Imperioli ("The Sopranos") stars in a play by Mike Batistick, about a Bronx man who gets mixed up in illegal cockfighting. In previews. (Studio Dante, 257 W. 29th St. 212-868-4444.)

CURTAINS
David Hyde Pierce plays a show-loving detective, in a new musical murder mystery by John Kander and the late Fred Ebb. In previews. (Al Hirschfeld, 302 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

DYING CITY
In a new play by Christopher Shinn, a woman is visited by the twin brother of her late husband, who died in Iraq. In previews. Opens March 4. (Mitzi E. Newhouse, Lincoln Center. 212-239-6200.)

HOWARD KATZ
Patrick Marber's dark comedy stars Alfred Molina as a high-powered talent agent whose life is going downhill. Doug Hughes directs. In previews. Opens March 1. (Laura Pels, 111 W. 46th St. 212-719-1300.)

JACK GOES BOATING
LAByrinth Theatre Company presents a play by Bob Glaudini, about dating, drugs, and betrayal. The cast includes Philip Seymour Hoffman and Daphne Rubin-Vega. In previews. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.)

KING HEDLEY II
The third play in Signature's August Wilson series depicts a struggling Pittsburgh neighborhood in the nineteen-eighties. In previews. (Peter Norton Space, 555 W. 42nd St. 212-244-7529.)

KING LEAR
Kevin Kline assumes the title role in James Lapine's production, which has an original score by Stephen Sondheim and Michael Starobin. In previews. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.)

MY TRIP TO AL-QAEDA
The *New Yorker* staff writer Lawrence Wright performs a solo piece based on his experiences researching his book "The Looming Tower." Gregory Mosher directs. Previews begin March 1. Opens March 5. (Culture Project, 55 Mercer St. 212-352-3101.)

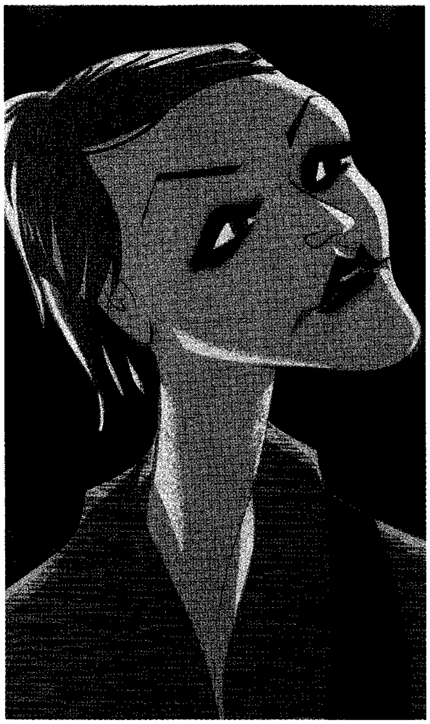
OUR LEADING LADY
Manhattan Theatre Club presents a play by Charles Busch, about the actors who performed at Ford's Theatre on the night of Lincoln's assassination. Lynne Meadow directs. In previews. (City Center, Stage II, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212.)

THE PIRATE QUEEN
A new musical by Alain Boublil and Claude-Michel Schönberg ("Les Misérables"), based on the story of the sixteenth-century Irish chieftain Grace O'Malley. Previews begin March 6. (Hilton, 213 W. 42nd St. 212-307-4100.)

PRELUDE TO A KISS
A neurotic young bride and an old man share an enchanted kiss, in the Roundabout's revival of Craig Lucas's wistful drama. In previews. (American Airlines, 227 W. 42nd St. 212-719-1300.)

SOME MEN
Terrence McNally's new play follows the reminiscences of the guests at a gay wedding. Directed by Trip Cullman. Previews begin March 2. (Second Stage, 307 W. 43rd St. 212-246-4422.)

SPALDING GRAY: STORIES LEFT TO TELL
Naked Angels stages a compilation of the late monologuist's work, arranged by Kathleen Russo (Gray's widow) and Lucy Sexton. In previews. Opens March 6. (Minetta Lane Theatre, 18 Minetta Lane. 212-307-7171.)



The Swedish singer El Perro del Mar pays a visit to the Bowery Ballroom.

TALK RADIO
Liev Schreiber plays the acerbic host of a Cleveland radio show, in a Broadway revival of Eric Bogosian's 1987 play. In previews. (Longacre, 220 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE YEAR OF MAGICAL THINKING
Vanessa Redgrave stars in Joan Didion's stage adaptation of her memoir, a reflection on grief and survival written after the death of her husband. David Hare directs. Previews begin March 6. (Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

NOW PLAYING

ADRIFT IN MACAO
An insouciant film-noir pastiche with a book and lyrics by Christopher Durang, who in an earlier age of American entertainment would have made a good living in revue. The musical teases the archetypes and attitudes of the broody, moody romantic genre; it is really a pocket revue in which the actors—especially Orville Mendoza and Michele Ragusa—get to clown, dance, and mug it up. At the finale, the audience even gets into the silliness and sings along with Peter Melnick's genial music. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200. Through March 4.)

ALL THAT I WILL EVER BE
In the course of Alan Ball's fascinating play, Omar (Peter Macdissi), a savvy phone salesman and bisexual hustler, claims to be French, Egyptian, Greek, Saudi, Iranian, Puerto Rican, and Algerian. Lying about his identity is Omar's defense against the humiliation of his invisibility in American society; in a series of mostly taut and well-written encounters, he finds himself variously ignored, abandoned, and paid to leave. Ball ("Six Feet Under") knows how to build a scene and make his sentences pop; his narrative authority gives the audience confidence that Omar's perplexing and prickly contradictions will lead to a satisfying psychological revelation—and they do. (Reviewed in our issue of 2/19 & 26/07.) (New York Theatre Workshop, 79 E. 4th St. 212-239-6200.)

BFF
Women's Expressive Theatre presents a dark comedy by Anna Ziegler, about a woman who is haunted by a secret from her adolescence. (DR2, at 103 E. 15th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE COAST OF UTOPIA, PART THREE: SALVAGE
The final installment of Tom Stoppard's epic. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 212-239-6200.)

THE FEVER
The New Group's revival of Wallace Shawn's ninety-minute political meditation begins with a congenial pre-show cocktail party onstage, where Shawn plays the host before settling into a leather chair and lowering the boom on the people he has just been mixing with. The narrator here—the Traveller, as he calls himself—is profoundly distressed at the torture and poverty he has recently witnessed in an unnamed Latin-American country. He begins to call into question his own life, and his culture's indifference to the suffering of others. Shawn's monologue is still as bold and as fresh as it was when it first appeared: a prophetic foreshadowing of America's current parlous political situation and an eloquent piece of dramatic prose. (2/19 & 26/07) (Acorn, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

HAMLET
The Wooster Group's adaptation, directed by Elizabeth LeCompte, is derived from Richard Burton's "Theatrofilm" version, from 1964. (St. Ann's Warehouse, 38 Water St., Brooklyn. 718-254-8779.)

JOURNEY'S END
R. C. Sherriff's stirring depiction of life under fire amidst the officer class during the First World War gets a first-class revival, with uniformly strong performances (the cast includes Hugh Dancy, Boyd Gaines, Jefferson Mays, and Stark Sands) and deft direction by David Grindley. The play's rock-solid structure and shrewd, unhectoring dialogue have an indubitable cumulative power that echoes down the ages to the futility of our present war. (Belasco, 111 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE MADRAS HOUSE
In the Mint Theatre's superb revival of Harley Granville-Barker's 1909 play, Constantine Madras (George Morfogen) returns to London to complete the sale of his department-store empire. Thirty years earlier, he abandoned wife, family, country, and culture for "Arabia." Is he a monster or a man of enlightenment? Directed by Gus Kaikkonen, the large, expert cast (which also includes Thomas M. Hammond and Laurie Kennedy) makes the wordy play sing. Granville-Barker provides not only a microscopic view of the family life, sexual politics, and working conditions of Edwardian England but a canvas on which to explore his broadest societal concerns. (311 W. 43rd St. 212-315-0231.)

MARAT/SADE
Peter Weiss's haunting play within a play is the second entry in the Classical Theatre of Harlem's season. Directed by Christopher McElroen. (H.S.A. Theatre, 645 St. Nicholas Ave. 212-868-4444.)

MARY ROSE
A revival of J. M. Barrie's romantic drama. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Vineyard, 108 E. 15th St. 212-353-0303.)

NTOZAKE SHANGE: A RETROSPECTIVE
New Federal Theatre presents an overview of the playwright's work. (Castillo, 543 W. 42nd St. 212-353-1176. Through March 4.)

SEALED FOR FRESHNESS
A comedy by Doug Stone, about a group of Midwestern housewives whose conventional lives begin to fall apart at a Tupperware party. (New World Stages, 340 W. 50th St. 212-239-6200.)

ERIC PALMA

A VERY COMMON PROCEDURE
Carolyn (Lynn Collins), a thirty-something yuppie, has gorgeous hair and a high-wattage smile that she switches on at inappropriate times—during fights with her devoted husband (Stephen Kunken) after the loss of their newborn, or on the illicit dates she arranges with Dr. Anil Patel (Amir Arison), the surgeon whose mistake caused the baby's death. Like the other characters in Courtney Baron's talky new play, Carolyn tends to address the audience directly. She's making an appeal for understanding, and although Michael Greif's unsentimental production successfully anatomizes her erratic, often repugnant behavior it refuses to pardon it. (Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. 212-279-4200.)

Also Playing

A CHORUS LINE: Schoenfeld, 236 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **THE COAST OF UTOPIA, PART ONE: VOYAGE:** Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 212-239-6200. **THE COAST OF UTOPIA, PART TWO: SHIPWRECK:** Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 212-239-6200. **COMPANY:** Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200. **GREY GARDENS:** Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200. **IN THE HEIGHTS:** 37 Arts, 450 W. 37th St. 212-307-4100. **THE JEW OF MALTA/THE MERCHANT OF VENICE:** Duke, 229 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200. **A SPANISH PLAY:** Classic Stage, 136 E. 13th St. 212-352-3101. Through March 4. **SPRING AWAKENING:** Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200. **TRANSLATIONS:** Biltmore, 261 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200. **THE VERTICAL HOUR:** Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **THE VOYSEY INHERITANCE:** Atlantic, 336 W. 20th St. 212-239-6200.

NIGHT LIFE
ROCK AND POP

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

B. B. KING BLUES CLUB & GRILL
237 W. 42nd St. (212-997-4144)—March 1: **Eddie Money,** the former New York City cop and radio stalwart responsible for such anthems as "Two Tickets to Paradise" and "Take Me Home Tonight." March 2: **Olu Dara,** a Mississippi-born avant-garde jazz cornettist who's also proved adept at the blues guitar but may be better known as the father of the hip-hop star Nas, is joined by the legendary folk and blues singer **Odetta.** March 4: The flamboyant and sublime sexagenarian soul singer **Solomon Burke,** whose latest album, "Nashville," is a country record. March 6: **Chris Difford.** In the early eighties, Difford and his songwriting partner, Glenn Tilbrook, were considered the Lennon and McCartney of their era for the smart, sophisticated songs they produced with their band, Squeeze. For this tour, his first of the United States in ten years, he is travelling with the pedal steel guitarist **Melvin Duffy** and the vocalist **Dorrie Jackson.** Difford's recent release of acoustic Squeeze covers, "South East Side Story," has the same instrumentation (and female singer) and turns his back catalogue into ideal midnight bedroom music.

BOWERY BALLROOM
6 Delancey St. (212-533-2111)—Feb. 28: **Young Love,** the work of the singer-songwriter Dan Keyes, cooks up over-leavened dance rock. March 1: **El Perro del Mar.** The beguiling Swedish vocalist Sarah Assbring records and performs under this name, which has something to do with a sad period in her life, a stray dog, and a beach in Spain. Her meticulous pop confections wrap loneliness, melancholy, and desperation in a sweet sound that stays true to the musical reputation of her homeland. March 2-3: **Bright Eyes.** The wildly prolific musician Conor Oberst, who has been known to charm critics and neo-hippies alike with his raw songs about drowned brothers, spiteful lovers, and the like, returns with a preview of his forthcoming album, "Cassadaga." March 6: **Grizzly Bear,** a Brooklyn-based group led by the singer and guitarist Edward Droste, stirs up songs that move like harmonic dust motes. In a recent interview, Droste's bandmate Daniel Rossen called their music "haiku rock," which is perhaps more poetic. They're on tour with the **Papercuts,** an outfit from San Francisco that specializes in sombre folk songs.

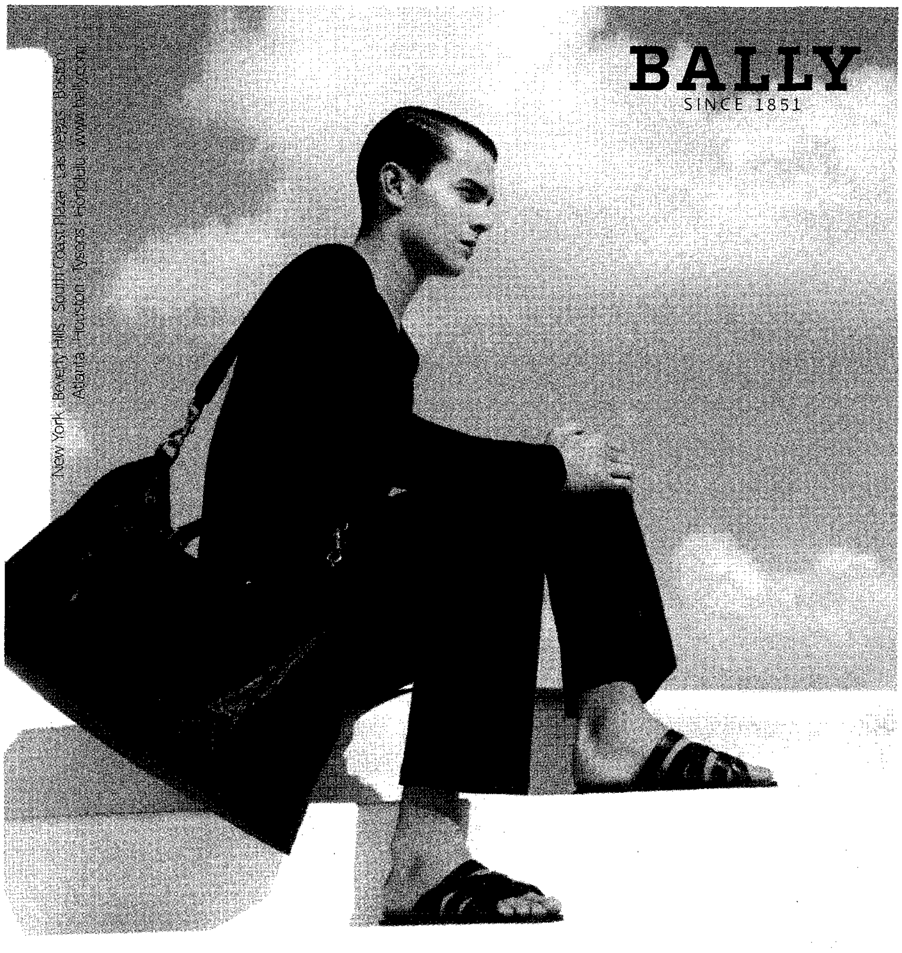
IRVING PLAZA
17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (212-777-6800)—March 1: **JJ Grey & Mofro.** Fronted by the Jacksonville, Florida, native John (JJ) Grey, this Southern-rocking band built its reputation with thick swamp funk. Its new record, "Country Ghetto," shows a more soulful side. It's tight all over and polished in parts (with horn lines). March 4: England's **Cradle of Filth** trades in overblown black metal that's as campy and cartoonish as it is blasphemous and profane.

JOE'S PUB
425 Lafayette St. (212-539-8777)—Feb. 28 and March 1: **Glen Phillips,** the former lead singer for Toad the Wet Sprocket, enlivened his band's rather unexceptional pop with a rich, emotive voice that belied the silliness of the band's name (which came from a Monty Python sketch). His solo work reflects well on his life as a family man (he's married, with three daughters and a dog). His latest effort, "Mr. Lemons," includes a cover of Huey Lewis's hit "I Want a New Drug." With the singer-songwriter **Craig Cardiff.** Also on March 1: The singer-songwriter **Elvis Perkins** has a sensibility that's part folk and part pop (he sounds like a cross between Bob Dylan and the Beatles, though, in fact, he's the son of the actor Anthony Perkins and the photographer Berry Berenson). Perkins's just-released début album, "Ash Wednesday," is a song cycle centering on the death of his mother, who was on one of the planes that crashed into the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001. This show is a warm-up for a spring tour around the U.S., which includes dates with the indie-rock phenom Clap Your Hands Say Yeah.

"LET'S ZYDECO"
March 4: The concert series dedicated to the indigenous music of Louisiana brings the **Pine Leaf Boys** to Connolly's, an Irish bar in midtown with a fine wooden dance floor. This Cajun group from Lafayette features Wilson Savoy, the son of the legendary accordion-makers and musicians Marc and Ann Savoy, on accordion and fiddle. (121 W. 45th St. For more information, call 212-685-7597 or visit www.letszydeco.com.)

LIVING ROOM
154 Ludlow St. (212-533-7235)—March 2: The astonishing Irish vocalist **Katell Keineg.** Later in the evening, **Winterpills,** a harmonizing quartet from western Massachusetts, celebrates the release of its latest CD, "The Light Divides." March 6: **Future Clouds and Radar.** In the late nineties, the Austin-based guitarist and singer Robert Harrison crafted shimmering power pop with the band Cotton Mather and picked up such fans as Noel Gallagher, of Oasis. After some serious critical acclaim, a touch of commercial success, and three albums, the band broke up in 2003. Now Harrison has returned with Future Clouds and Radar, an ensemble that can number up to sixteen musicians, and a sprawling self-titled double album of orchestral art rock.

LUNA LOUNGE
361 Metropolitan Ave., Brooklyn (718-384-7112)—The storied East Village club, where the Strokes, Interpol, Elliott Smith, and countless other acts played to small crowds in its back room, has reopened in Williamsburg, after a two-year search for a new home. There's more space now, and the commitment to high-quality shows is unwavering. Feb. 28: The singer and guitarist **Rob Dickinson,** who favors soaring, atmospheric rock much like his former band, the Catherine Wheel. March 3: The arch English threesome the **Young Knives** plays brash post-punk with a wry sense of humor. They favor tweed sports coats, profess to enjoy gardening, and aren't above silly names (the bassist calls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himself the House of Lords). They are doing quite well at home, thank you very much, and are visiting the States in support of their début album, "Voices of Animals and Men." With Brooklyn's **Foreign Islands,** a trio of synth-fuelled dance-happy rockers. March 4: **Elvis Perkins** (see Joe's Pub).

MERCURY LOUNGE

217 E. Houston St. (212-260-4700)—Feb. 28: **Alexa Ray Joel,** the daughter of Billy Joel and Christie Brinkley, plays the piano and sings straightforward pop ditties. March 2: **Rob Dickinson** (see the Luna Lounge) followed by the **Bird and the Bee,** a duo from Los Angeles trafficking in smooth jewels with facets of vintage bossa nova, sixties girl groups, and contemporary hip-hop. Later in the evening: The **Young Knives** and **Foreign Islands** (see the Luna Lounge). March 4: The **Essex Green,** a trio from Brooklyn, is not ashamed to return to the sweet side of the psychedelic sixties.

TOWN HALL

123 W. 43rd St. (212-840-2824)—March 1: Michael Dorf, a founder of the Knitting Factory, celebrates the twentieth anniversary of his former club, which is still going strong in Tribeca. **John Zorn, Lou Reed, Laurie Anderson, Medeski, Martin & Wood, Mike Doughty, Joe Lovano, Marc Ribot, Lee Ranaldo, Don Byron, Steven Bernstein, DJ Spooky,** and a number of guests are expected. The show benefits the Stone, Zorn's experimental-music venue in the East Village. March 6: The Uruguayan singer-songwriter **Jorge Drexler,** who two years ago became the first Spanish-language performer to win an Oscar for Best Song in a Film, with "Al Otro Lado del Rio," from "The Motorcycle Diaries."

WORLD MUSIC INSTITUTE

March 2: **Martin Hayes** and **Dennis Cahill** present the finest in Irish fiddling and guitar work. (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St.) March 3: Contemporary English folk music with **Waterson:Carthy,** featuring the guitarist and vocalist Martin Carthy. (Symphony Space. For more information about both concerts, call 212-545-7536.)

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

BIRDLAND

315 W. 44th St. (212-581-3080)—Feb. 28-March 3: The **Cedar Walton** trio. Beneath the pianist Walton's mild-mannered surface is a jazzman of steely power and intelligence. He's a renowned improviser and composer of durable jazz standards.

BLUE NOTE

131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (212-475-8592)—Feb. 27-March 4: Brazilian jazz minus any rough edges from the composer and pianist **Ivan Lins** and **Trio Da Paz.**

CAFÉ CARLYLE

Madison Ave. at 76th St. (212-744-1600)—Through March 2: The folk goddess **Judy Collins** has long had a taste for theatrical material, even scoring a major hit with Sondheim's "Send in the Clowns," in 1975. Collins, who has always shown a balanced eclecticism, has also kept her pristine voice in tip-top condition.

DIZZY'S CLUB COCA-COLA

Broadway at 60th St. (212-258-9595)—Feb. 27-March 4: "Rev-Elation!—the Music of Milt Jackson" features three of the late master vibraphonist's associates: the drummer **Mickey Roker,** the bassist **Bob Cranshaw,** and the pianist **Mike Ledonne; Joe Locke,** a fluent improviser in the Jackson mold, will stand in for "Bags."

JAZZ STANDARD

116 E. 27th St. (212-576-2232)—March 1-3: The accomplished pianist and singer **Dena DeRose** is backed by a rhythm dream team, the bassist **Martin Wind** and the drummer **Matt Wilson.**

JOE'S PUB

425 Lafayette St. (212-539-8777)—March 3: **Myra Melford's** Be Bread ensemble unites the venturesome keyboardist with the trumpeter **Cuong Vu,** the guitarist **Brandon Ross,** the bassist **Stomu Takeishi,** and the drummer **Elliot Humberto Kavee.**

VILLAGE VANGUARD

178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—Feb. 27-March 4: Best known as a frequent collaborator with the new-jazz visionary Anthony Braxton, the pianist **Marilyn Crispell** has, through her recent association with ECM Records, carved out a strikingly individual identity of her own, particularly with her trio featuring the bassist **Mark Helias** and the drummer **Paul Motian.** The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.

ZANKEL HALL

Carnegie Hall, 57th St. at Seventh Ave. (212-247-7800)—Feb. 28: One of the major figures to arise from New York's jazz scene of the eighties, the pianist **Geri Allen,** who is a strong soloist and composer, draws from both mainstream and free-jazz sources. Her trio here includes the bassist **Darryl Hall** and the great drummer **Jimmy Cobb,** the last surviving member of Miles Davis's "Kind of Blue" ensemble.

ART
MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM

Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-535-7710)—**"Louis Comfort Tiffany and Laurelton Hall: An Artist's Country Estate."** Through May 20. ♦ **"Nan Kempner: American Chic."** Through March 4. ♦ **"Discovering Tutankhamun: The Photographs of Harry Burton."** Through April 29. ♦ **"One of a Kind: The Studio Craft Movement."** Through Sept. 3. ♦ **"Flowing Streams: Scenes from Japanese Art and Life."** Through June 3. ♦ **"Closed Circuit: Video and New Media at the Metropolitan."** A sampling of works from the museum's small but growing collection of video art; among the artists represented are Ann Hamilton, David Hammons, Jim Campbell, Darren Almond, and Maria Marshall. Through April 29. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9400)—**"Armando Reverón"** is a beguiling retrospective of a Venezuelan painter, hardly known in North America, who died in 1954 at the age of sixty-five. Reverón was an idiosyncratic modernist, winsomely mad. He spent most of his life in a jerry-built beach compound with a woman companion, selling his art to tourists. In addition to his paintings, he made tangy Dadaistic sculpture, including life-size dolls that he regarded as friends. Dainty and coarse, his painting style developed from filmy and skittery all-white landscapes, often on burlap, through sepia-toned nudes to picturesque harbor views and vigorously rumpled self-portraits. His nudes of the thirties are terrific: shadowy bodies like sensual fever dreams. Through April 16. ♦ Josiah McElheny's sculptural installation imagines a utopian city of glass. Through April 9. ♦ **"Artistic Collaborations: Fifty Years at Universal Limited Art Editions."** Through May 21. ♦ **"Live/Work: Performance Into Drawing."** Works on paper that relate to performance-art pieces. Through May 7. ♦ **"Jeff Wall,"** a mid-career survey of the Canadian photographer's work. Through May 14. (Open Wednesdays through Mondays, 10:30 to 5:30, and Friday evenings until 8.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM

Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—**"Spanish Painting from El Greco to Picasso: Time, Truth, and Memory"** includes works by Zurbarán, Murillo, Velázquez, and Cotán, among many others. Through March 28. ♦ Work by Tacita Dean, the 2006 recipient of the Hugo Boss Prize for contemporary art, is on view through June 6. ♦ **"Family Pictures"** showcases contemporary photography and video depicting families and children; among the artists included are Patty Chang, Loretta Lux, Sally Mann, Gregory Crewdson, Gillian Wearing, and Thomas Struth. Through April 16. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Fridays, 10 to 8.)

CLASSICAL NOTES
VENETIAN GAMES

Vivaldi's operas have not held the stage: he lacked Handel's gift for psychological insight and dramatic pacing. But Europe is full of front-rank early-music groups and stylish young singers, so the vibrant brand of musicianship heard on the Ensemble Matheus's new recording of **"Griselda"** (Naïve), part of an avalanche of Vivaldi releases from the past few years, comes as no surprise. The French orchestra gives a crisp and exciting performance under the direction of Jean-Christophe Spinosi, and the soprano Simone Kermes and the countertenor Philippe Jaroussky, two standouts in the cast, display tonal purity and superb coloratura technique. Vivaldi's delectable arias, with their unexpected curves, jagged, irregular phrases, and gleaming string colors, reflect the seductive light and rhythm of Venice, his water-ringed home town.

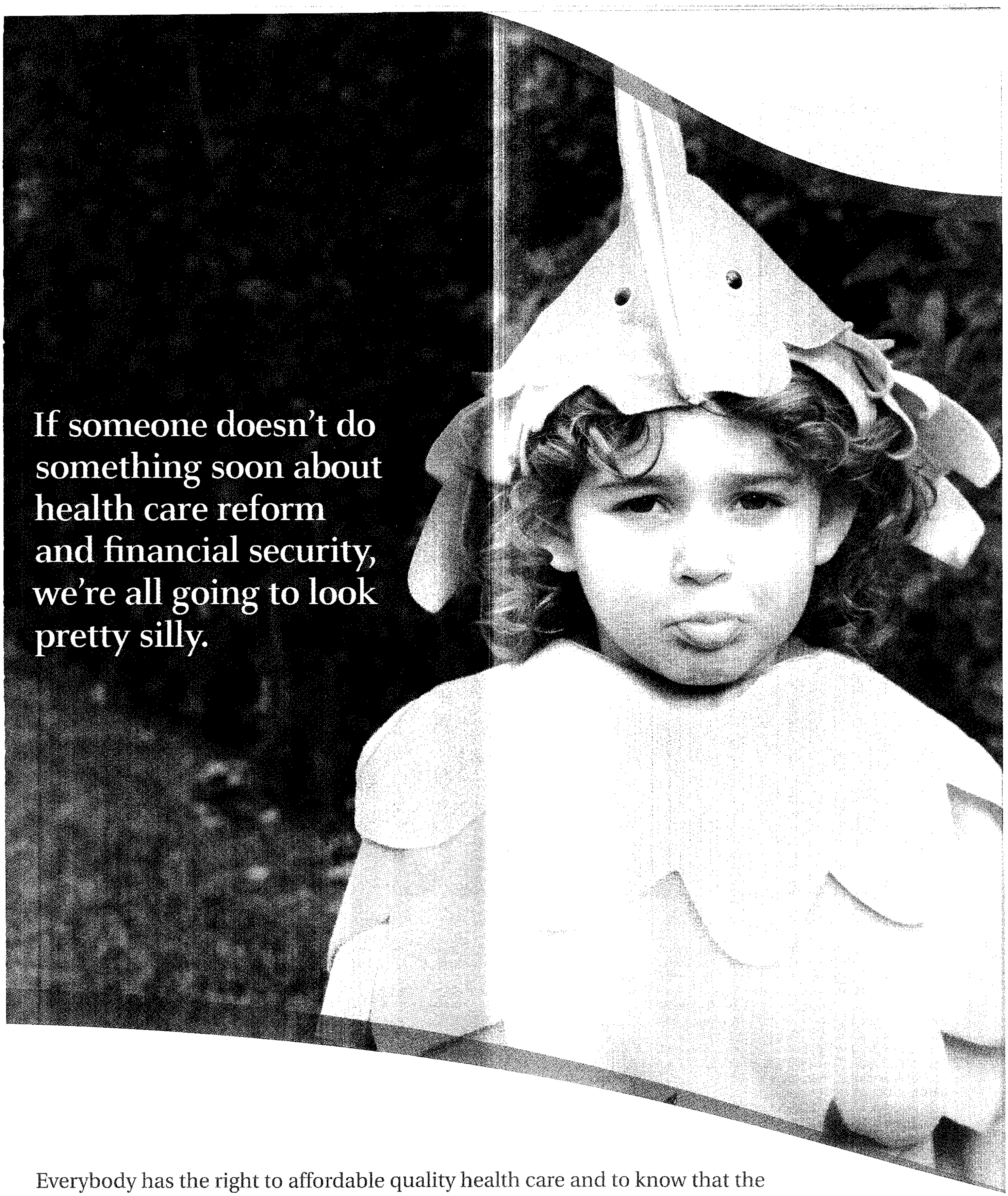
Philip Glass, a superior man of the theatre, has always known his audience. For **"The Witches of Venice,"** that audience is primarily children, and this opera-ballet, which débuted at La Scala in 1995, is one of his most appealing works. The late writer and designer Beni Montresor wrote the libretto, and this new release (on Orange Mountain Music) is packaged like a book; kids can read along while the music goes by. The vigor and originality of the piece make it just as entertaining for their parents.

Perhaps the greatest composer associated with Venice was Claudio Monteverdi, who served as the music director of St. Mark's Basilica for thirty years; his magnificent **"Combattimento di Tancredi e Clorinda"** had its première at the Palazzo Mocenigo during the carnival season of 1624-25. This madrigal of love and war is hardly obscure, but a new recording by Emmanuelle Haïm's Concert d'Astrée (on Virgin) features the tenor Rolando Villazón, who brings a virile verismo manner to this late-Renaissance masterwork. Not since Luciano Pavarotti recorded the title role of Mozart's "Idomeneo" has a mainstream operatic tenor reached back into the past with such powerful and persuasive results.

—*Russell Platt*

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART

Madison Ave. at 75th St. (800-944-8639)—Lorna Simpson's elegiac photographs and videos address issues of race and gender in American history. She is the subject of a mid-career survey opening March 1. ♦ **"Photography and the Self: The Legacy of F. Holland Day."** Through March 11. ♦ Terence Koh's one-room work comprises a single four-thousand-watt bulb in a lamp pointed at viewers, a withering assault on the senses. The work is rife with metaphors, particularly of the Icarian stripe, but ultimately it's a bit short on substance. Through May 27. ♦ **"Gordon Matta-Clark,"** a retrospective of work by the artist


If someone doesn't do something soon about health care reform and financial security, we're all going to look pretty silly.

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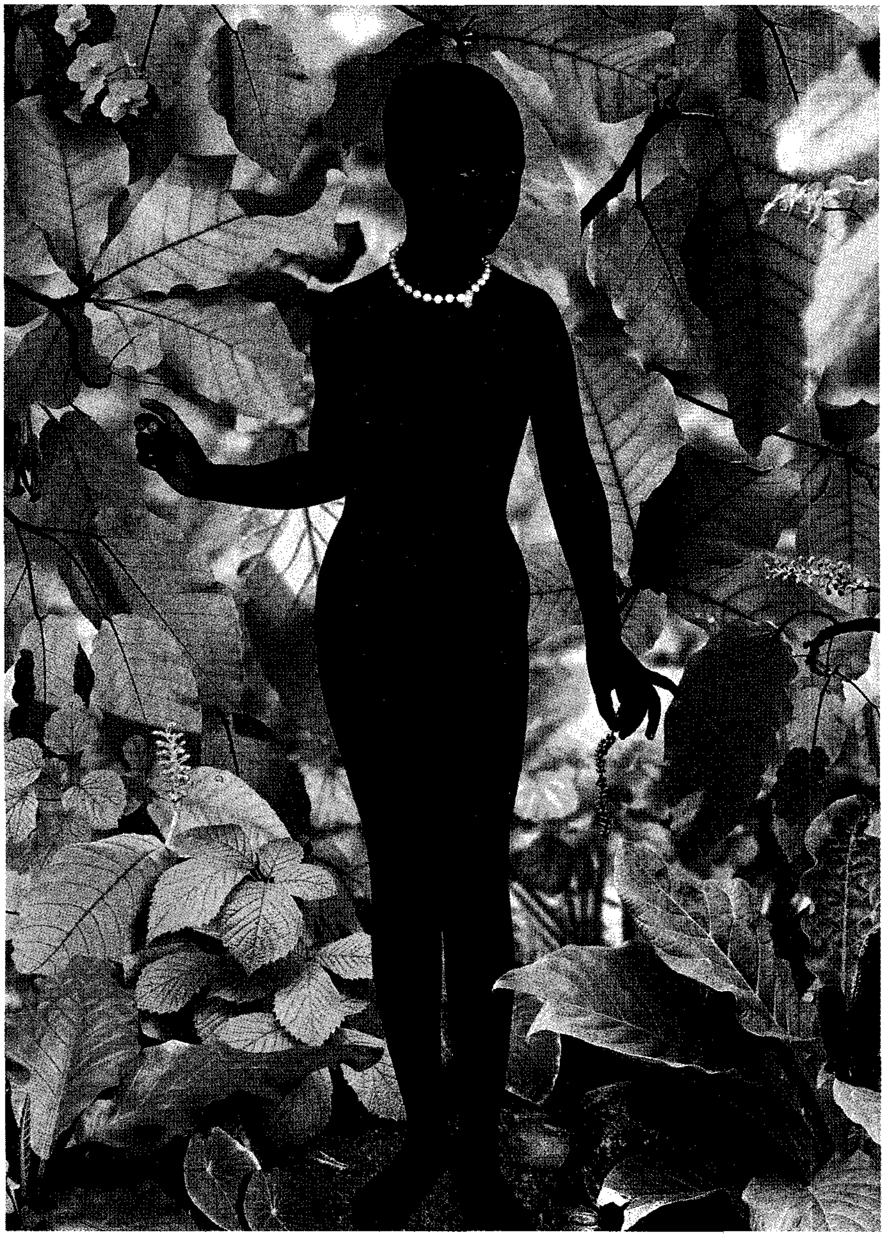

Work by Ruud van Empel, including the Cibachrome "Venus #1" (above), is at Stux.

(1943-78) best known for his "building cuts." Through June 7. (Open Wednesdays, Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 1 to 9.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM AT ALTRIA
120 Park Ave., at 42nd St. (917-663-2453)—**"Burgeoning Geometries"** presents work by Diana Cooper, Jane South, Phoebe Washburn, Charles Goldman, Jason Rogenes, and Tara Donovan. Through March 4. (Open Mondays through Fridays, 11 to 6, and Thursday evenings until 7:30.)

FRICK COLLECTION
1 E. 70th St. (212-288-0700)—**"George Stubbs (1724-1806): A Celebration."** Through May 27. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 5.)

INTERNATIONAL CENTER OF PHOTOGRAPHY
1133 Sixth Ave., at 43rd St. (212-857-0000)—**"Martin Munkacsi: Think While You Shoot!"** Through April 29. ♦ **"Henri Cartier-Bresson's Scrapbook: Photographs, 1932-46."** Through April 29. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, and Saturdays and Sundays, 10 to 6, and Fridays, 10 to 8.)

MORGAN LIBRARY AND MUSEUM
225 Madison Ave., at 36th St. (212-685-0008)—Books, bindings, illustrations, and promotional materials dating from 1837 to 1901 are on view in **"Victorian Bestsellers."** Through May 6. ♦ **"Saul Steinberg: Illuminations."** Through March 4. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10:30 to 5, Fridays, 10:30 to 9, Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

MUSEUM OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK
Fifth Ave. at 103rd St. (212-534-1672)—**"A City on Paper: Saul Steinberg's New York."** Through March 25. ♦ **"Robert Moses and the Modern City: Remaking the Metropolis."** Through May 28. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 10 to 5.)

QUEENS MUSEUM OF ART
Flushing Meadows–Corona Park (718-592-9700)—**"Robert Moses and the Modern City: The Road to Recreation."** Through May 27. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5, and Saturdays and Sundays, noon to 5.)

SCULPTURECENTER
44-19 Purves St., Long Island City (718-361-1750)—Monica Bonvicini presents two billboard-size word sculptures—"BUILT FOR CRIME," picked out in marquee lights, and a mirrored "DESIRE." She wants us to ask, "What? By and from whom?" Dutifully, we answer, "Everything and everyone," and the job is done. Through March 25. ♦ Downstairs, the winter installment of the emerging-artist series **"In Practice Projects"** looks equally lacklustre. Far-flung marvels—like Utah's monumental Kennecott Copper Mine (Lucy Raven), roller-coaster simulators (Garrett Ricciardi and Ross Cisneros), and Jean Vigo's classic 1934 film, "L'Atalante" (Karen Yasinsky)—make promising premises. But the results underwhelm. With Alex Arcadia, Fia Backström, Amy O'Neill, Garder Eide Einarsson, and Karin Schneider. Through March 25. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, 11 to 6.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

Galleries are usually open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6; please call the gallery for exact hours.

WOUT BERGER / MIKE BRODIE
Berger, a Dutch photographer interested in the interdependence of man and nature, shows large-scale images of greenhouses, a hyacinth harvest, and wildflowers and weeds sprouting in sandy fields, the last of which invite total sensory immersion. Even more inviting are the twenty-one-year-old Brodie's little Polaroids of friends and acquaintances made in the course of cross-country road trips. Perhaps because Brodie is from Florida and his subjects are mostly from the South, his pictures recall Walker Evans and William Eggleston, but there's something a lot more soulful and intimate here, especially in his images of children. His New York début, modest but never tentative, marks him as someone to watch. Through March 10. (Benrubi, 41 E. 57th St. 212-888-6007.)

"DIANE ARBUS—HELEN LEVITT: A CONVERSATION"
This pairing of two great New York street photographers was probably inevitable, but it didn't have to be this much fun. Not only do Arbus and Levitt bring out the best in one another (the former looks wittier, the latter more satirical), the shrewd combinations here make them appear separated at birth. One of Levitt's pictures of tenement kids dancing on the sidewalk is hung next to Arbus's shot of preteen ballroom dancers in a well-practiced clinch. Levitt's little boy with a sooty slash of Halloween mustache faces off with Arbus's bare-chested, mustachioed midget. Groupings of smokers, aging couples, and masked figures never seem to stretch the point or scrape the bottom of the barrel. Through March 10. (Laurence Miller, 20 W. 57th St. 212-397-3930.)

"ROBERT MOSES AND THE MODERN CITY"
A three-part documentary exhibition—heavy on photographs, maps, and city-planner's models—summarizes evidence for and against Robert Moses and his projects. At the Wallach gallery, "Slum Clearance and the Superblock Solution" tracks the split between the commissioner's ideal of constructing modern high-rises for the middle class and his zeal for bulldozing nonwhite neighborhoods. At the Museum of the City of New York, "Remaking the Metropolis" counts coups and failures in transforming what Moses termed a city "created by and for traffic": the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway and Triborough Bridge built, the Lower Manhattan Expressway and Fifth Avenue Extension (which would have bisected Washington Square Park) averted by popular outcry. "The Road to Recreation," at the Queens Museum of Art, softens the ruthless image somewhat, celebrating an interborough string of playgrounds, swimming pools, parks, and beaches established between 1934 and 1960 by the man even Fiorello LaGuardia feared. Through April 14 at the Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Art Gallery (Columbia University, Schermerhorn Hall, 8th fl., 212-854-7288. See also listings for the Museum of the City of New York and the Queens Museum of Art.)

Short List

JOSEPH BEUYS: Zwirner & Wirth, 32 E. 69th St. 212-517-8677. Through March 31. **DAVID HAMMONS:** L & M, 45 E. 78th St. 212-861-0020. Through March 10.

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

ROBERT GOBER
A pair of vest-pocket shows feature works on paper, with one sculpture in each space. The imagery is vintage Gober: normal household items invested with uncanny anxieties, plus a soupçon of criticism directed at American macho. That which should be hard is soft and vice versa, giving us flaccid shotguns and self-entwining anchors, while apples and scraps of quilted packing blankets are cast in painted plaster. The blankets achieve a quiet menace: are they waiting to wrap a corpse? But most of the work, including a pair of hyperrealistic woodcuts mimicking receipts from the Monument Valley Tribal Park, feels too enamored of its own power of suggestion. Through March 10. (Marks, 526 W. 22nd St. and 521 W. 21st St. 212-243-0200.)

MARC HANDELMAN
You know immediately what you're not supposed to like about Handelman's paintings: the gaudy stars and bursts of light; the retro motifs that recall sixties hard-edged abstraction, disco, tie-dye. Yet Handelman has a keen sense of what is ripe for recycling. These paintings might not have worked a decade ago, but they're perfect for a moment when abstract painting is in a state of flux and no one field of references reigns. Add to this the sources from which he cribs the outlines of his compositions—billboard advertisements, for one—and you sense that Handelman has already figured out how to make these paintings work on some subversive, subliminal level. Through March 3. (Sikkema Jenkins, 530 W. 22nd St. 212-929-2262.)

JUNE LEAF
Leaf's assemblages and paintings focus on the Nova Scotia landscape where she resides, along with a cast of iconic acrobats and circus equestrians whose pedigree goes back toward Picasso. The small figures—reliefs in sheet tin and sculptures of found metal—express a melancholic glee proper to their role as existential entertainers, while a series of "mechanical scrolls"—tabletop painted scrims on rusty armatures, with delicate gears and cranks—suggest the theatricality of all such handmade totems. The paintings don't always attain this balance of sure gesture with whimsical accident, but a single incisive self-portrait drawing anchors the whole show. Through March 10. (Thorp, 210 Eleventh Ave., at 24th St. 212-691-6565.)

ANTHONY McCALL
In photographs, McCall's installations look like early-twentieth-century geometric abstractions, or perhaps Zaha Hadid's architectural paintings. Standing inside one is an entirely different experience. In "You and I, Horizontal (III)," thirty-five-foot-long projections create the illusion of solid light. McCall's work expands on earlier explorations by light-obsessed artists like Dan Flavin and James Turrell; the primary difference is that he started off as a filmmaker, and it shows. His work addresses, if not overtly, a fundamental fantasy of the moviegoer: to climb inside the film and occupy a space somewhere between the real and the imaginary, the material and the ethereal. Through March 17. (Sean Kelly, 528 W. 29th St. 212-239-1181.)

ROBERT MANGOLD
The astringent abstractionist is on a roll. Twelve ten-foot-high shaped canvases, like skinny letters of an alien alphabet, assert lyrically precise scale: big enough to command, not so big as to oppress. Acerbic color, slightly dishevelled acrylic surfaces, and faintly pencilled grids defer to bold graphite arabesques, done freehand, whose coursings from bottom to top thrill like baritone arias. Eccentric canvas shapes accommodate the lines' departures from rectangular logic. These works are less paintings than epic drawings that use painting as a launchpad. They exhilarate. Through March 10. (PaceWildenstein, 545 W. 22nd St. 212-989-4258.)

RICHARD RENALDI
Although Renaldi's color photographs of people and places in Texas, Nevada, Kansas, Wyoming,

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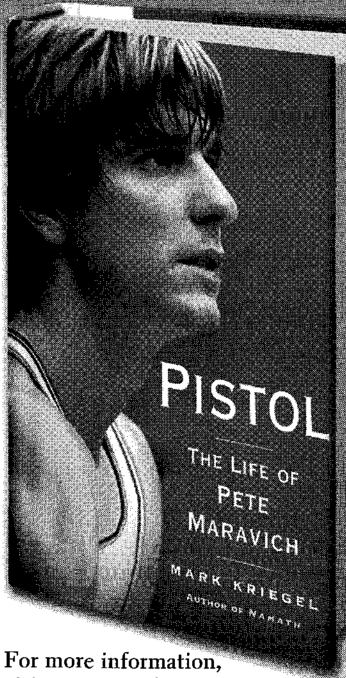
—Rick Telander, author of *Heaven Is a Playground* and senior sports columnist, *Chicago Sun-Times*



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CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
MAN OF IRAN

The word "humanist" has a slightly moldy sound, but the Iranian director Abbas Kiarostami, who is being given a career retrospective at MOMA, starting March 1, in conjunction with other events devoted to him around town, redeems humanism by combining it with enchanting formal play. Kiarostami can turn the simplest action into a philosophical quest. Among the best of his feature films, one can sample "Taste of Cherry" (1997), in which a formidable-looking man, wandering about in his car, tries to induce strangers to help him commit suicide, and two witty movies that examine the relationship between cinema and reality. "Through the Olive Trees" (1994), which follows the misadventures of a crew shooting a film in rural Iran, at first seems to be a joke about the way life resists being turned into a movie, but it becomes a better joke about a movie that transforms life. In "Close-Up" (1990), Kiarostami, in semi-documentary mode, re-creates the true story of an unemployed dreamer—an ardent cinephile—who passes himself off as the director Mohsen Makhmalbaf, a fraudulent act that becomes both an homage and a fresh work of art.

—*David Denby*

and other Plains states are essentially reportorial, there's a lot of feeling on both sides of the lens. Working with a view camera on a tripod, Renaldi poses strangers in the landscape—often a road leading straight off into the distance—and hopes for a connection. What's remarkable is how often he makes it; his portraits never feel rushed, and even the coolest pictures have richness and warmth. Interspersed with evocative landscapes in this sensitively edited show, Renaldi's portraits are reserved but assured, like folks you'd really like to know better. Through March 3. (Milo, 525 W. 25th St. 212-414-0370.)

"VARIATIONS ON A THEME: SIX RUMINATIONS ON RECURRENCE"
The title may be a bit heavy-handed, but this exhibition of photographs, prints, and a video has an appealingly light touch. Prints from Yayoi Kusama's "Infinity Net" series set up a buzz of dense repeated patterns in the gallery's central space; cooler, quieter work fills the rooms on either side. In one, an accordion-fold book of Hiroshi Sugimoto's hypnotic "Sea of Buddha" photos is smartly juxtaposed with grids of elephants, chickens, a baboon, and a jaguar from Eadweard Muybridge's "Animal Locomotion" series. The capper: nineteen Katsumi Omura photos of birds and telephone wires against washed-out cream skies—spare, calligraphic, and perfectly imbalanced. Through March 3. (Sepia, 148 W. 24th St. 212-645-9444.)

Short List

THOMAS ALLEN: Foley, 547 W. 27th St. 212-244-9081. Through March 3. **JEAN-CHRISTIAN BOURCART:** Meislin, 526 W. 26th St. 212-627-2552. Through March 3. **CHARLES LEDRAY:** Sperone Westwater, 415 W. 13th St. 212-999-7337. Through March 24. **RUUD VAN EMPEL:** Stux, 530 W. 25th St. 212-352-1600. Through March 17. **CORBAN WALKER:** PaceWildenstein, 534 W. 25th St. 212-929-7000. Through March 10. **GILLIAN WEARING:** Rosen, 525 W. 24th St. 212-627-6000. Through March 10.

DANCE

PAUL TAYLOR DANCE COMPANY
For his company's fifty-third season, Paul Taylor has again made two pieces: one sad and dark, the other silly and buoyant. The nine episodes in "Lines of Loss," which will have its world première at City Center, are set to cuts of plaintive string music from the Kronos Quartet's album "Early Music." Gradually, individuals emerge from its lines and circles to depict their particular experiences of loss, from physical deterioration to inconsolable grief. The newly minted "Troilus and Cressida (reduced)," on the other hand, is a jolly romp through the palace, resplendent with cupids, Greek invaders, and costumes (by Santo Loquasto) worthy of "The Carol Burnett Show." The two new works are sprinkled amid sixteen repertory pieces. (City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. March 2-3 at 8, March 4 at 3, and March 6 at 7. Through March 18. For daily programs, see www.nycitycenter.org.)

"THREE ATMOSPHERIC STUDIES"
The choreographic works made by the Long Island-raised, Frankfurt-based William Forsythe can elicit strong reactions: excitement, surprise, frustration. In Europe, he is generally revered as a dance pioneer. Those who are irritated by his radically anti-aesthetic and vehemently intellectual approach to dance-theatre may find his newest work—a meditation on war in the Middle East—hard going. It is an unapologetically political piece in which he illustrates the horrors of occupation, propaganda, and bodies broken by violence through cleverly crafted text, powerful images, and passages of furious, thrashing movement. (Howard Gilman Opera House, Brooklyn Academy of Music, 30 Lafayette Ave. 718-636-4100. Feb. 28-March 3 at 7:30.)

JOE CHVALA AND THE FLYING FOOT FORUM
Based in Minneapolis, Chvala and his troupe make their first visit to New York in more than a decade. Percussive dance, conceived broadly, is his domain, with a repertory that ranges from country frolics, lovely and light in their restraint, to trite variations on "Stomp." At the 92nd Street Y's Harkness Dance Festival, Chvala presents "Flying Feet," an abstract work that focusses on the production of sound: taps on the floor, drumsticks on metal chimes. The "visual percussion" composer Mary Ellen Childs contributes a body-slapping "hambone" section. (Ailey Citigroup Theatre, 405 W. 55th St. 212-415-5500. Feb. 28, March 1, and March 3 at 8 and March 4 at 2 and 7.)

ANNA SPERBER
Walls of different sizes surround the stage on three sides in "The Tiger Situation," the first evening-length piece by the Movement Research-affiliated choreographer Anna Sperber. In a series of scenes set to a mix of silence and original music (by Peter Kerlin and Jon Moniaci), six women in vibrantly colored, slightly fantastical street clothes explore the uses of their own weight and strength, through intricate floor work, physical struggles, repeated falls, and propulsive forward motion. In between bouts of exertion, they watch each other. (Dance Theatre Workshop, 219 W. 19th St. 212-924-0077. March 1-3 at 7:30.)

CHANTAL YZERMANS / RADICAL LOW
Best known for her collaborations with video artists, on this occasion the Belgian choreographer teams up with a composer, her compatriot Koen Lybaert. Presented by Danspace Project, their "ONR-I, Allegory of Night" places the story of Orpheus end to end with that of Hephaestus, filling the dark places in these Greek myths with the sounds of ambient electronica. (St. Mark's In-the-Bowery, Second Ave. at 10th St. 212-674-8194. March 1-3 at 8:30.)

MIGUEL GUTIERREZ AND THE POWERFUL PEOPLE
In "Everyone," the members of Gutierrez's ensemble pass around movement phrases, share a monologue, and trade clothing. Like Chris Forsyth's score, played live, the dance proceeds in short motifs that shift subtly as they repeat—a method that has its longueurs but also provides its share of surprises. The self-conscious casualness is undercut by a self-deprecating wit, and the makeout session at the end is unexpectedly uplifting. Co-presented by Danspace Project. (Abrons Arts Center, 466 Grand St. 212-352-3101. March 1 at 7:30, March 2-3 at 7:30 and 9:30, and March 4 at 3. Through March 11.)

PEGGY SPINA TAP COMPANY
Spina has been offering cozy concerts in her SoHo loft for more than a quarter century. The make-it-look-easy air she cultivates in her company of young women can fade into blandness, but the unamplified and amiable combination of Spina's laid-back dancers, her musically sophisticated choreography, and the playing of the Joel Forrester Quartet is a treat nevertheless. (Spina Loft, 115 Prince St. 212-674-8885. March 2-3 at 6 and 8:30.)

SALLY GROSS AND COMPANY
Structurally austere but rich in poetry, Gross's minimalist dance works have earned her a dedicated following over the course of her long career, which began in the early sixties among the postmodernists of the Judson Dance Theatre. This weekend at the Joyce SoHo, she and the other five women in her company will perform two new works, along with two pieces from last year. (155 Mercer St. 212-334-7479. March 2-4 at 8.)

"YOU MADE ME A MONSTER"
As in "Three Atmospheric Studies" (see above), broken bodies are at the heart of this meditation by William Forsythe on the dehumanizing effects of disease, a deeply personal reaction to the death of his first wife from cancer. Audience members wander among "do it yourself" skeletal models, creating grotesque versions of the human body. Meanwhile, two dancers interpret and bring to life these fractured, agonized forms. The piece will be performed at the Baryshnikov Arts Center as part of the "Art Is Otherwise" festival (see Above and Beyond). (450 W. 37th St. 212-279-4200. March 6-7 at 7, 8, 9, and 10.)

DIVYA SRINIVASAN

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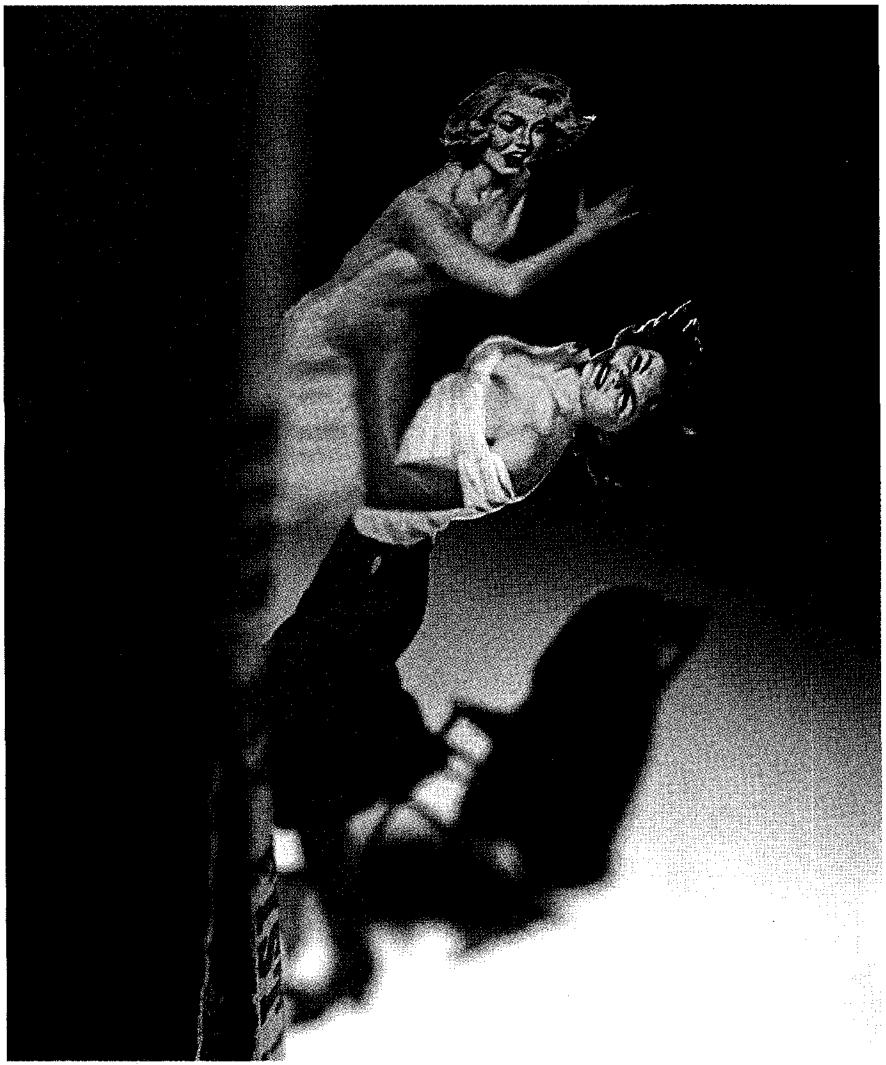


Thomas Allen's photographs, including "Fury," are at Foley through March 3.

CLASSICAL MUSIC

OPERA

METROPOLITAN OPERA
Renée Fleming and Dmitri Hvorostovsky, in the leading roles of Tchaikovsky's **"Eugene Onegin,"** turn in carefully calibrated and dramatically effective performances that will satisfy their fans. But the more satisfying contributions come from Ramón Vargas, who turns the role of Lenski into an unexpected star vehicle, and from the conductor Valery Gergiev and the wonderful orchestra, who buttress Robert Carsen's nearly abstract production (bare sets, plush costumes) with a palpably Russian sonic landscape. (Feb. 28 at 8.) ♦ With Paul Nadler replacing Gergiev. (March 3 at 8.) ♦ **"Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg"** is one of James Levine's specialties—he imbues it with a Mozartean sense of lightness that can make the performance's five-hour span pass by with an agreeable celerity. The cast features such house favorites as Hei-Kyung Hong, Johan Botha, Evgeny Nikitin, and the redoubtable James Morris in the role of Hans Sachs. (March 1 and March 5 at 6.) ♦ The sets, costumes, and goings on in Julie Taymor's entertaining production of Mozart's **"Die Zauberflöte"** can make the cast seem almost secondary, though this revival boasts an impressive roster that includes Lisa Milne, Cornelia Götz, Michael Schade, and Rodion Pogossov; Levine. (March 2 at 8.) ♦ The starry cast of the Met's revival of **"Simon Boccanegra"** testifies to the house's administrative command, with Thomas Hampson, Angela Gheorghiu, Marcello Giordani, and Ferruccio Furlanetto in the leading roles. Furlanetto's and Gheorghiu's heartfelt performances—and a collection of gorgeous, if slightly anachronistic, sets and costumes—ameliorate the excesses of Verdi and Boito's convoluted plot; Fabio Luisi. (March 3 at 1:30.) ♦ With Angela Marambio replacing Gheorghiu. (March 6 at 8.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)

NEW YORK CITY OPERA
The company, in challenging times, relies on the grander specimens of musical comedy to fill the seats. Fortunately, Gilbert and Sullivan's "Savoy operas" are well treated here, and **"The Pirates of Penzance,"** which opens its spring season, features not only the Broadway stars Marc Kudisch (as the Pirate King) and Mark Jacoby but also such skillful house comedians as Myrna Paris and Kevin Burdette, and Sarah Jane McMahon and Matt Morgan as the romantic leads; Gerald Steichen conducts three preview performances. (March 3 at 1:30 and 8 and March 4 at 1:30.) (New York State Theatre. 212-721-6500.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC
Kurt Masur, the orchestra's music director emeritus, returns to the Philharmonic with the up-and-coming Armenian violinist Sergey Khachatryan under his wing—though Khachatryan, a first-prize winner in both the Sibelius and Queen Elisabeth Competitions, can probably fend for himself. He plays the Sibelius Violin Concerto on a program that also features music by Tchaikovsky (the Symphony No. 6, "Pathétique") and an old Masur favorite, Mendelssohn. (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-875-5656. Feb. 28 and March 1 at 7:30 and March 3 at 8.)

PHILADELPHIA ORCHESTRA
Christoph Eschenbach's turbulent tenure as music director has shaken the mettle of this still sumptuous ensemble. Charles Dutoit, the elegant Swiss master, has a long track record with the orchestra, however, and he will bring them to town with the magnificent Martha Argerich, who will be the soloist in Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 2 in B-Flat Major; the balance of the program consists of two chestnuts, Sibelius's "Finlandia" and Rimsky-Korsakov's "Scheherezade." (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. March 1 at 8.)

VIENNA PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA
March 2 at 8: Daniel Barenboim, a conductor noted as much for his headstrong impetuosity as for his interpretive insight, brings the world's most stylish and most cohesive ensemble to Carnegie Hall. The first of their three programs, an evening of echt-Viennese symphonies by Schubert (the charming Fifth) and Bruckner (the towering Seventh), will not be without some unexpected twists. ♦ March 3 at 8: A vigorous all-Bartók concert features the Dance Suite, the Piano Concerto No. 2 (with the excitable Lang Lang, showing some range), and the Music for Strings, Percussion, and Celesta. ♦ March 4 at 2: Barenboim preludes a selection of Wagner excerpts (including the "Dawn and Siegfried's Journey" and "Funeral Music," from "Götterdämmerung" and the "Meistersinger" Overture) with the Fourth Symphony by Schumann, a composer whose work he conducts with overwhelming passion and authority. (212-247-7800.)

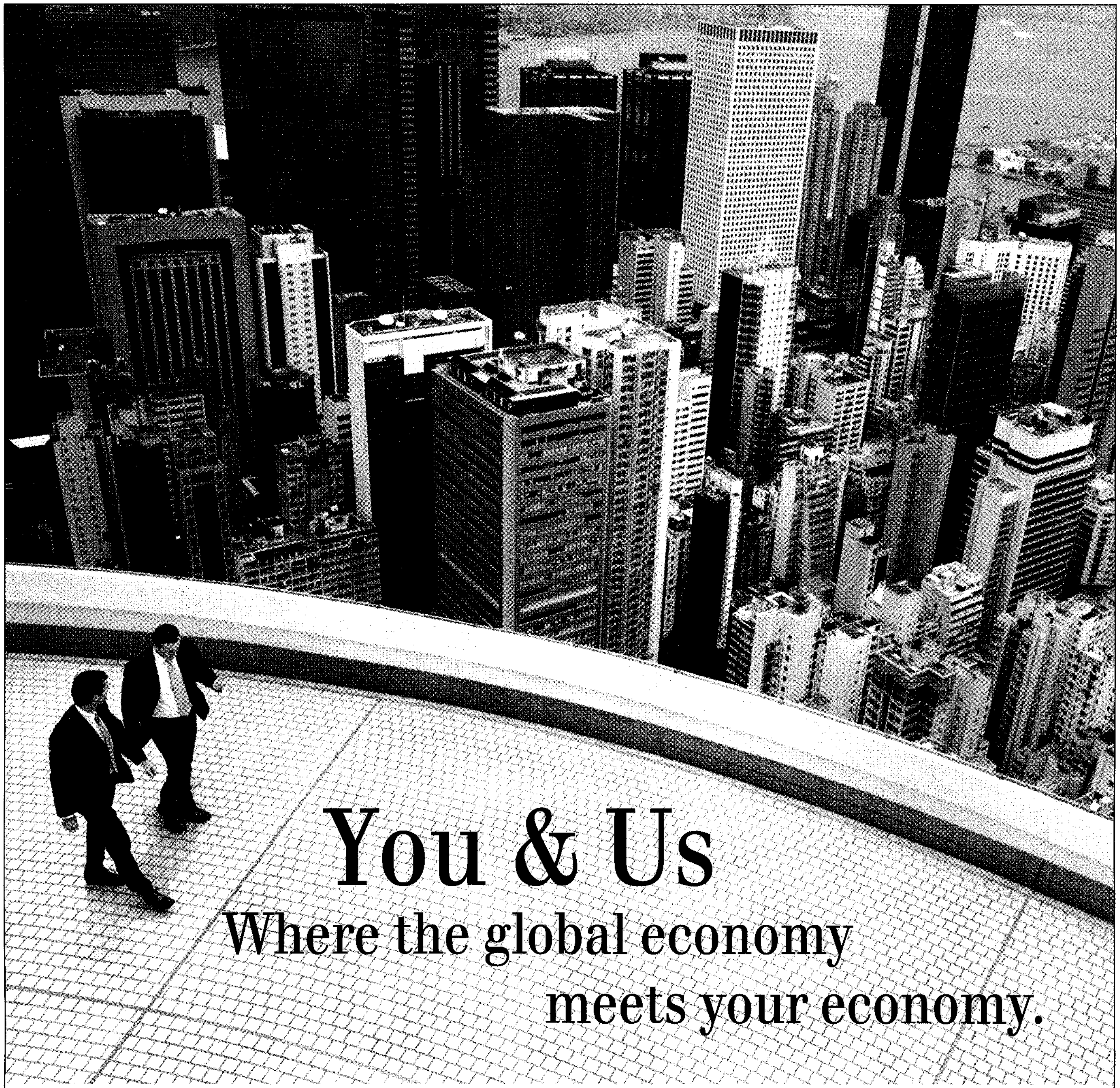
LEIPZIG GEWANDHAUS ORCHESTRA
A great week for orchestras at Carnegie Hall continues with two concerts by the storied German ensemble, led with Italianate flair by Riccardo Chailly. March 5 at 8: Yundi Li will be the guest artist in Liszt's enjoyably showy Piano Concerto No. 1 in E-Flat Major, bookended by performances of two Strauss works, "Don Juan" and "Ein Heldenleben." ♦ March 6 at 8: Mahler's Symphony No. 5 is preceded by his "retouched" version of Schumann's "Spring" Symphony, a lively but top-heavy work that could stand some orchestrational slimming. (212-247-7800.)

RECITALS

JOYCE DIDONATO AND JULIUS DRAKE
The rising young American mezzo-soprano, about to take up the role of Rosina in the Met's "Barber of Seville," teams up with the formidable pianist for songs by Bizet, Granados, and, of course, Rossini ("Giovanna d'Arco"). (Weill Recital Hall, Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. March 1 at 7:30.)

ZANKEL HALL RECITALS
March 1 at 7:30: An all-Schubert concert (crowned by the grand Duo in A Major, D. 574) is offered by a venerable pair, the violinist Jaime Laredo and the pianist Leon Fleisher. ♦ March 4 at 5: A typically formidable program from James Levine and his Met Chamber Ensemble features works by Mozart, Brahms (the Serenade No. 2), and Elliott Carter (his Elizabeth Bishop cycle, "A Mirror on Which to Dwell," with the soprano Lucy Shelton). ♦ March 6 at 7:30: Songs to poems by that ultimate German Romantic, Eichendorff (including Schumann's "Liederkreis," Op. 39, and works by Mendelssohn, Brahms, and Wolf), are featured in a recital by Michael Schade, one of the Met's expert Mozart tenors; Malcolm Martineau accompanies him. (212-247-7800.)

JUILLIARD STRING QUARTET
An all-Mozart concert—featuring three of the "Haydn" Quartets—marks the close of the sixtieth-anniversary season of the renowned ensemble, which more than any other quartet has given voice to the nervy, rough-edged brilliance of New York. (Alice



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CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
ENUF SAID

When Ntozake Shange's first theatre piece, "for colored girls who have considered suicide/when the rainbow is enuf," was produced on Broadway, in 1976, all sorts of people who might never have set foot in a Broadway house—black nationalists, feminist separatists—came to experience Shange's firebomb of a poem. In "colored girls," the disenfranchised heard a voice they could recognize, one that combined the trickster spirit of Richard Pryor with a kind of mournful blues. Since then, Shange has gone on to write a number of plays, presaging dramatists such as Suzan-Lori Parks who write out of a similar love of the black community. To celebrate Shange's thirty-year career as a playwright, Woodie King, Jr.,'s New Federal Theatre presents a retrospective of her work, bringing together excerpts from her gorgeous, humorous, and unforgettable theatre of interiority and observation. A case in point: this week, Dianne McIntyre stages "It Hasn't Always Been This Way," a one-act drama from 1980 about the ways in which racism infects the heady demands of love.

GRANT SHAFFER

—*Hilton Als*

Tully Hall. March 1 at 8. For information on free tickets, which are required, call 212-769-7406.)

NORTH RIVER MUSIC: ALLEN SHAWN
The intrepid downtown new-music collective presents a concert of recent music by the admired Bennington composer, featuring the premières of works written for the bassoonist Natalya Rose Vrbsky and the pianist Yoshiko Sato ("Childhood Scenes"); the composer, a pianist, will also perform. (Renee Wilder Concert Hall, 46 Barrow St. 212-242-4770. March 1 at 8.)

BANG ON A CAN ALL-STARS
For a decade now, the downtown group has been putting the people's money to good use, collecting audience contributions to commission new music from innovative composers. This year it performs works by Stefan Weisman, Joshua Penman, and Lukas Ligeti, before being joined for a set with the avant-garde heroine Meredith Monk. (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 212-501-3330. March 1 at 8.)

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM ARTISTS IN CONCERT
The cellist Edward Arron's dynamic group of musicians—including the violinist Jennifer Frautschi and the violist Nicholas Cords—offer a wide-ranging concert of music by Schubert, Kodály (the Duo for Violin and Cello), Kurtág, and Brahms (the String Quintet in G Major, Op. 111). (Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. 212-570-3949. March 2 at 8.)

MUSIC FROM JAPAN FESTIVAL
The vital series, an annual celebration of folk-inspired Japanese music, returns to Merkin Concert Hall. March 3 at 8: "The World of Joji Yuasa," a five-decade retrospective devoted to the distinguished composer (performed by such first-rate musicians as the conductor Jeffrey Milarsky, the flutist Tara Helen O'Connor, and the guitarist Oren Fader), features the world première of "Five Haiku from Buson." ♦ March 4 at 3: A concert offered by the Junko Tahara Biwa Ensemble introduces New Yorkers to the sound of its eponymous instrument, a lute-like cousin to the Chinese pi-pa; it begins with another commission, Masataka Matsuo's "Biwa Yuyu." (129 W. 67th St. 212-501-3330.)

MOVIES OPENING

BLACK SNAKE MOAN
Reviewed below in Now Playing. Opening March 2. (In wide release.)

THE CATS OF MIRIKITANI
Reviewed below in Now Playing. Opening March 2. (Cinema Village.)

INTO GREAT SILENCE
A documentary, directed by Philip Gröning, about Carthusian monks in a French monastery. In French and Latin. Opening Feb. 28. (Film Forum.)

TWO WEEKS
Steve Stockman directed this comic drama about a family that gathers around its dying matriarch (Sally Field). Opening March 2. (Union Square.)

WILD HOGS
An adventure comedy, directed by Walt Becker, about four suburban men who try to shake up their routine by going on a motorcycle trip. Starring John Travolta, William H. Macy, Martin Lawrence, and Tim Allen. Opening March 2. (In wide release.)

WILD TIGERS I HAVE KNOWN
Cam Archer directed this coming-of-age drama, about a thirteen-year-old boy who is infatuated with an older boy. Opening Feb. 28. (IFC Center.)

ZODIAC
Reviewed below in Now Playing. Opening March 2. (In wide release.)

NOW PLAYING

AMAZING GRACE
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (In wide release.)

BAMAKO
A courtroom drama with a difference. The tribunal in question, in one family's courtyard in a poor neighborhood in the capital of Mali, has no legal power but plenty of moral authority: its unofficial judges are trying the World Bank and the I.M.F. for their role in Africa's economic and social crises. Like all trials, this one opens the floodgates to rhetorical posturing, but the director, Abderrahmane Sissako, quickly gets past the bluster with careful, canny framings and poignant vignettes of daily life in and around the courtyard. With a light touch, a dry wit, and vast sympathy, he sketches the local ways of birth, death, health, work, art, law, and love—and suggests their painfully frustrating dependence on bureaucratic levers pulled half a world away. In French and Bambara.—*Richard Brody* (Film Forum.)

BECAUSE I SAID SO
She should have said no. The great Diane Keaton bombs out in this comedy, poorly directed by Michael Lehmann, about a neurotic, overbearing mother who tries to help her relationship-impaired daughter (Mandy Moore) find happiness. When Keaton meets a worthy suitor for her daughter, she also, predictably, falls in love with the boy's readily available dad (Stephen Collins). The clichés fly like cream pies, and Lehmann coaxes a broad, pandering performance from Keaton that buries her distinctive comic style under hopeless sight gags and insipid one-liners. Above all, the movie lacks the essential ingredient of a romantic comedy: charm.—*Bruce Diones* (In wide release.)

BLACK SNAKE MOAN
An intermittently engrossing but sanctimonious mess. Lazarus (Samuel L. Jackson), a small-time farmer and erstwhile bluesman, lives alone with the burning anger that has consumed him since his wife left him for his brother. Rae (Christina Ricci), an abused nymphomaniac prone to fits and flashbacks, loves the troubled Ronnie (Justin Timberlake), who has just shipped out for the Army, but she can't stay faithful to him for even a few hours. Finding her drugged, drunk, and bloodied on a back road near his farm, Lazarus takes her in and nurtures her with tough love, in a process of chaste mutual redemption that is as contrived and sentimental as it sounds. The writer-director, Craig Brewer, lovingly depicts the heartiness of country ways, but he is after something bigger than reality, and his quasi-mythological churnings boil down to this: messed-up white people depend on pious, soulful black folk to make them whole again. His inversion of long-discredited stereotypes smacks unintentionally of nostalgia for faithful servants. Despite the appealing locations, tangy dialogue, and intense, sincere performances (John Cothran is robust as R.L., a backwoods minister), this heady rural stew of violence, race, lust, and religion strains after Faulknerian depth but is mostly Southern-fried hooey.—*R.B.* (In wide release.)

BREACH
A sombre real-life thriller about an incomprehensible man—Robert Hanssen (a leathery Chris Cooper), who spied for the Soviet Union and Russia for more than two decades while productively employed as a counter-intelligence agent for the F.B.I. Hanssen loved this country, didn't spy for money, went to church all the time, and also made films, for a male friend, of himself and his longtime wife making love. The movie is devoted to the young and ambitious F.B.I. employee, Eric O'Neill (Ryan Phillippe), who helped trap Hanssen (he was arrested in February, 2001). Most thrillers are hyped up; this one is grayed out. Tak Fujimoto shot it in subdued light, mostly in dour institutional corridors. The unexciting look and feel of the movie would be acceptable if the filmmakers had penetrated Hanssen's skull a little, but they didn't. Written by Adam Mazer, William Rotko, and Billy Ray, and directed by Ray. The picture was made in consultation with Eric O'Neill.—*David Denby* (Reviewed in our issue of 2/19 & 26/07.) (In wide release.)

BREAKING AND ENTERING
At home, Will Francis (Jude Law), a fashionable young London architect, has a difficult time. Liv

(Robin Wright Penn), his girlfriend of ten years, a melancholy, becalmed beauty of mixed Swedish and American background, has a talented, lively autistic daughter—a terrific gymnast who won't eat and can't sleep or calm down. Will's office in North London is repeatedly burglarized after hours. Will stakes it out one night and follows the thief, a fifteen-year-old boy, Miro (Rafi Gavron), to an apartment in a council flat, where he discovers Miro's mother, Amira (Juliette Binoche), a Bosnian refugee with a refined face and a full peasant body. He starts an affair with her, going back and forth between the two women. The romantic drama is set against the changing milieu of the King's Cross area, a multicultural gathering ground in which not terribly dangerous thieves and hookers from the Balkans and elsewhere try to find some way of fitting into an alien society. Written and directed by Anthony Minghella, the movie is shrewd and benevolent but rather mild—clemency, not judgment, is in Minghella's heart. Vera Farmiga has a hilarious bit as a huffy Balkan streetwalker wearing very little under her overcoat.—*D.D.* (1/29/07) (Paris and Sunshine Cinema.)

BRIDGE TO TERABITHIA
Katherine Paterson's children's classic gets an imaginative, emotional telling in director Gabor Csupo's film about a bullied fifth grader (Josh Hutcherson) whose friendship with a young girl (AnnaSophia Robb) leads them to create a made-up, escapist world. Screenwriters Jeff Stockwell and David Paterson (the author's son) have crafted a wonderful and affecting story, deftly balancing the real-world problems of introverted children and the fantasy lives they create to help them deal with their solitude. The special effects suggest a Narnia-like romp, but the movie has a darker, more sorrowful landscape to explore and it does so brilliantly, with true nuance and heartfelt sincerity.—*B.D.* (In wide release.)

THE CATS OF MIRIKITANI
For her directing début, Linda Hattendorf found a remarkable subject in the laconic Jimmy Mirikitani, an eighty-year-old homeless Japanese-American artist and former detainee at an internment camp in California during the Second World War who was living on the streets of SoHo. When the attacks of 9/11 permeated the air of lower Manhattan with toxic fumes, Hattendorf invited Mirikitani, whom she had been casually filming, to take shelter in her downtown apartment. She documents their growing relationship as she helps him find lost relatives and, in spite of his reluctance, helps him get off the streets. With little more than a simple video camera, Hattendorf builds an acute, riveting portrait of a humble and dignified man whose obsession with the injustices he (and thousands of others) suffered is uneasily mitigated by human connection.—*Shauna Lyon* (Cinema Village.)

CONAN THE BARBARIAN
At the beginning of this 1982 adaptation of Robert E. Howard's pulp prehistoric legend, Conan's father tells him to trust only in steel; then he watches as his dad is felled by the forces of Thulsa Doom (played by James Earl Jones, in a Darth Vader redux) and devoured by attack dogs. Soon afterward, Little Orphan Conan holds his mother's hand as Doom lops off her head. No wonder the adult Conan (Arnold Schwarzenegger) says the best part of life is "to crush your enemies . . . and hear the lamentations of their women." Working from a script by himself and Oliver Stone, the director John Milius creates a single mood: Hadean anarchy, with skulls dropping like dandruff. As a director, he's a bit of a barbaric thief himself, referencing every possible epic-movie master from Eisenstein to Peckinpah; too bad even the climactic battle, an homage to Kurosawa's "Seven Samurai," goes by in a sandy haze. Luckily, Schwarzenegger is, in context, rather likable; his ultra-blank deadpan provides an amusing comment on all the sound and the fury exploding around him.—*Michael Sragow* (Sunshine Cinema; March 2-3.)

DAYS OF GLORY
A fascinating French battle epic devoted to an ironic subject—the bravery of Muslim soldiers from French North Africa who fought during the Second World War for "*la patrie*." But what, for these men, was *la patrie*? Colonial Algeria or Morocco? Denied standard leave and promotions, the men at times feel an intense chagrin. They are fighting to liberate France and desperately want recognition from the French, but what is France going to do for them? As in an American platoon film from the forties, there is the young man who needs to prove himself, the soldier who falls in love, the tough sergeant who both bullies and loves the men. Some of the staging is stiff, but there's a dandy little battle at the end, in which the unit of North Africans finds itself defending a village in Alsace-Lorraine against the Wehrmacht. With Jamel Debbouze, Samy Naceri, and Roschdy Zem. Directed by Rachid Bouchareb, who co-wrote the script with Olivier Lorelle. In French and Arabic.—*D.D.* (In wide release.)

THE DEVIL PROBABLY
Constructed as a flashback from reports of a young man's suspicious suicide, Robert Bresson's splenetic 1977 drama puts the post-1968 world on trial and judges it unlivable. Charles (Antoine Monnier), a quietly imperious sensualist of blazing intelligence, lives idly in a bare garret and does nothing but brazenly chase women. Essaying the gamut of modern options—politics, religion, education, drugs, psychoanalysis—he finds them all pointless. When Alberte (Tina Irissari) takes up with him, Charles meets her former lover, the writer and environmentalist Michel (Henri de Maublanc), who shows him atrocious documentary footage of dire pollution, deepening his despair. Bresson's chilling images of daily life—including a brilliant sequence aboard a bus that shows the mechanical world in all its horror—suggest its hostility to the sacred passions of youth. The result, however, is almost a parody of Bresson's tamped-down spiritual universe: these children of the revolution tremble with uncertainty, and their loose gestures and shambling ways conflict fatally with his precise images. Not only the world, but Bresson's cinema, is in disarray—yet the signs of his inner conflict are deeply troubling and tremendously moving. In French.—*R.B.* (French Institute Alliance Française; March 6.)

FACTORY GIRL
Edie Sedgwick, the skinny sixties heiress with enormous eyes and great legs who became a *Vogue* "youthquaker" and Warhol superstar and then, cast off by the great man, died of an overdose at twenty-eight, has inspired a kind of whirling minor bio-pic in which the heroine (Sienna Miller) burns brightly and then snuffs herself out. It's a very strange movie, frantic and useless, with a hyperactive camera that gives us no more than fleeting impressions of Edie in Warhol's Factory, Edie ecstatic at parties, Edie strung out on drugs, Edie lying, mostly naked, on a bed, her skin splotchy from injections. Miller laughs, fidgets, and acts up a storm of desperate anxiety, but the inexpressive script (by Aaron Richard Golub and the screenwriter who styles himself Captain Mauzner) doesn't help very much. Guy Pearce, who plays Warhol, has the appropriate interior slump, the ineffable malign vagueness, but the movie has nothing new to say about the Warhol scene and its victims, and we're left with the impression that the movie got made because Edie is still just notorious enough to be exploited one more time. Directed by George Hickenlooper.—*D.D.* (2/19 & 26/07) (In wide release.)

THE LIVES OF OTHERS
This first feature from the young German director Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck starts in 1984, in East Berlin. A successful playwright (Sebastian Koch) and his girlfriend (Martina Gedeck), hitherto trusted by the state, are placed under Stasi surveillance. Their investigator, a lonely ascetic by the name of Wiesler (Ulrich Mühe), is told to entrap them, instead of which, little by little, he lets them off the hook. Given the movie's cross-weave of envy, terror, paranoia, and endangered principle, Donnersmarck might have been expected to tie himself in knots; yet the outcome, after two and a half hours, remains taut and clear, and by the end you feel exhausted and oddly uplifted. What was the last new movie that put you through so much yet convinced you that the ordeal was worthwhile? With Ulrich Tukur as Wiesler's cheerfully vicious boss. In German.—*Anthony Lane* (2/12/07) (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

THE MESSENGERS
The Hong Kong directors Danny and Oxide Pang (who made the intriguing horror film "The Eye"

TABLES FOR TWO
THE WAVERLY INN & GARDEN

16 Bank St. (212-243-7900)—This red brick town house was built in the eighteen-thirties. Before being reborn, last year, it was a low-key hangout beloved for its high-rolling Connect Four matches. For years, its denizens have reported sightings of an apparition, which, it is said, wears a top hat and causes fireplace logs to ignite spontaneously. In 1958, an ocelot named Lancelot appeared in the dining room, having supposedly jumped out of a nearby window and crawled through the restaurant's cellar grate.

Apocrypha abound, as ever—though lately, since the editor in chief of *Vanity Fair,* Graydon Carter, and several partners took over, they're of a less hoary variety. Did Ellen Barkin throw a drink at Ron Perelman? Does the truffled mac and cheese really cost fifty-five bucks? The lack of a functional reservations line would suggest that most of us will never get the chance to find out. But one of the place's pretensions is that it's anti-pretense; if you want a table, just walk up and ask. (Not that the famous people are subjected to this ritual.) And, so, sprinkled in amongst the fashionable types—on a chilly recent evening, Jann Wenner drank rosé while the Ralph Laurens supped en famille and Mr. Herrera perused his menu by votive-candle light—are tattooed old-timers and true believers who thrill at Carter's attempts to resurrect the Don't-I-know-you-from-somewhere city of Mrs. Astor's Four Hundred and can tick off every last personage depicted in the room's magnificent mural, by Edward Sorel. For the layman, the experience feels sort of like being on an airplane: things are fine in coach, but you get the idea they're having even more fun in first class.

But, no matter where you're sitting, the food is worth the trip: hot flaky biscuits to start, well-packed crab cakes, roasted carrots that taste of green market, not Gerber, and can entirely change your impression of the vegetable. The Berkshire pork chop comes with a baked apple, a cinnamon stick for a spit—county-fair fare for the urban sophisticate. Someone at the next table starts in on a "New York is so boring" monologue. What can you do but eat it up? (Open daily for dinner. Entrées $14-$39.)

—*Lauren Collins*

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
A SPARKLING EYE

If Martin Munkacsi's name rings a bell, it's most likely because Richard Avedon often cited the Hungarian-born photographer (1896-1963) as an early, enduring influence. Beginning in

the mid-nineteen-thirties, Munkacsi's pictures of women running and leaping across the pages of *Harper's Bazaar* injected a fresh, brash energy into what had been a staid business. But the irrepressible spirit that Munkacsi brought to fashion had already made him famous as a photojournalist who could arrest action without sapping its excitement, and it's these images (as well as many taken after he emigrated to the U.S., in 1934) that make his retrospective at I.C.P. so engaging. Although he lived through some of history's darkest days (and there are photos of massed S.S. troops to prove it), the images that defined his career fairly explode with joie de vivre. Dancers, divers, bathers, models, and an effortlessly antic Fred Astaire—in Munkacsi's world, half the population finds itself levitating in midair, and the rest looks on in wonder.

—*Vince Aletti*

a few years ago) take on their first American feature with the discipline of master filmmakers. The Pang brothers' great strength is in ambiguity, a restless curiosity about things not quite seen. Their way of crafting suspense, using a camera that seems to be hovering like a ghost amid the atmospheric lighting, together with the razor-sharp sound effects that they employ, makes for a perfect fright-film experience. But Mark Wheaton's script, a thin retread of haunted-house films, lets the directors down at every well-prepared scare. The obvious horror tropes and the stifling dialogue snuff out their ethereal impulses. Starring Dylan McDermott and Penelope Ann Miller.—*B.D.* (In wide release.)

MUSIC AND LYRICS
In this lightweight comedy written and directed by Marc Lawrence, Hugh Grant plays a former member of a New Wave act with a chance at a musical comeback and Drew Barrymore plays his plant caretaker, who just happens to have a gift for lyrics. The movie is boilerplate listless in its romantic twists and turns, and both Barrymore and Grant seem to be following diagrams of their past performances in similar roles. Still, the movie is amiable enough to be entertaining, and some of the supporting performances, especially from Kristen Johnston as Barrymore's idol-smitten sister, are terrific. The music, by Adam Schlesinger, of Fountains of Wayne, who crafted perfect pop tunes for "That Thing You Do," is too intentionally joke-ridden and misses the magic this songwriting partnership sorely needs.—*B.D.* (In wide release.)

NORBIT
Eddie Murphy mocks every stereotype in the book and invents a few of his own in this raucous, vulgar comic extravaganza. In the three lead roles—as the mild-mannered title character; Rasputia, the blustering, obese harridan he marries; and Mr. Wong, the owner of the Chinese restaurant-*cum*-orphanage where he was raised—Murphy cuts loose with a panoply of antic impressions unmatched since the heyday of Jerry Lewis. As Norbit, Murphy channels the meek persona at the center of many Lewis classics, down to the accent, but he centers the film around Rasputia, a scintillating, uproarious villain. Despite the innumerable gags about her physique, this is, above all, a comedy of spousal abuse, and Rasputia's oppressive, disturbing conduct is deplorable, not her attributes. Whatever personal demons Murphy is exorcising by camping it up in drag while wearing a fat suit, he is clearly saying nothing about fat people in general but a great deal about himself. Unfortunately, the director, Brian Robbins, doesn't do much more than stage-manage the riotous proceedings. Though less than the sum of its parts, the movie is, even when not quite funny, nothing less than virtuosic—and if there's any justice in pop culture, it should coin a new catchphrase: "How *you* doin'?"—*R.B.* (In wide release.)

NOTES ON A SCANDAL
A sensationally nasty and perceptive entertainment about sexual obsession and class. Judi Dench is the sixty-five-ish Barbara, a desperately lonely but formidable teacher in a dreary North London comprehensive school; Cate Blanchett is Sheba, her protégée at the school, a comfortable married bohemian who teaches art and falls in love with a cheeky fifteen-year-old working-class student (Andrew Simpson). Patrick Marber has adapted Zoë Heller's novel, which was written entirely from Barbara's point of view, and the material has now been cast in the third person; the camera observes all the characters objectively while Barbara's acerbic, self-deceiving narration wickedly frames the action. The suspense builds mercilessly as the guileless Sheba, whose placid existence is threatened by her heedless love affair, falls into the clutches of her devouring older "friend." Philip Glass's swirling music presses the issue with unnecessary insistence. With Bill Nighy as Sheba's outraged husband. Directed by Richard Eyre.—*D.D.* (1/15/07) (In wide release.)

SMOKIN' ACES
A put-on thriller made in a spirit of rabid, itchy, crack-den heartlessness—screw-you nihilism as a joke. Joe Carnahan, the writer-director, sets up a simple situation: every killer in the country—gay neo-Nazis with masks and horns, professional assassins who bite off their own fingertips—is converging on Lake Tahoe to whack Buddy (Aces) Israel (Jeremy Piven), a popular night-club magician whom the Mafia wants dead (the reward: a million dollars). The movie is a scuzzbag jamboree. What do you do with all these superfluous characters? You kill them off in freaky ways. "Smokin' Aces" has been made with the kind of extreme violence and antic slovenliness that wins a movie the honorific label of "black comedy." But the only comedy lies in the filmmakers' delusion that they have become mean hipsters pushing through old barriers and joyriding into realms of undreamed-of freedom. Tarantino and others have been there before.—*D.D.* (1/29/07) (In wide release.)

ZODIAC
The so-called Zodiac killer, long an obsession of journalists, book writers, and bloggers, murdered at least five people in the San Francisco Bay Area in 1968 and 1969 and then sent confessions (sometimes in code) to newspapers. David Fincher's film about the affair, which takes the story to 1991, starts with a murder scene that is as creepy as anything Fincher has ever done, but most of the movie is uncharacteristically (and absorbingly) matter-of-fact. Operating with a script by Robert Graysmith—a cartoonist at the San Francisco *Chronicle* at the time of the killings who subsequently wrote two books about Zodiac—Fincher has made what is likely the most detailed crime procedural in movie history. The atmosphere and personalities in newspaper and police offices, the little bits of evidence, and the eurekas leading to blind alleys are all re-created with the excitement of fresh discovery. But, in the end, the teasing mystery of the killer's identity wears just about everyone out, both onscreen and off. With Jake Gyllenhaal as Graysmith, Chloë Sevigny as Graysmith's wife, Robert Downey, Jr., as a brilliant, self-destructive reporter, Mark Ruffalo and Anthony Edwards as hardworking cops, and the heavy-domed John Carroll Lynch as the most likely suspect.—*D.D.* (In wide release.)

Also Playing

THE ASTRONAUT FARMER: In wide release. **DADDY'S LITTLE GIRLS:** In wide release. **GHOST RIDER:** In wide release. **HANNIBAL RISING:** In wide release. **STARTER FOR 10:** In wide release.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES
32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (212-505-5181)—In revival. Feb. 28 and March 1 at 7 and 9:30 and March 2-3 at 4:30, 7, and 9:30: "The Wayward Cloud" (2005, Tsai Ming-liang; in Mandarin). ♦ March 3-4 at 2: "Sátántangó" (1994, Béla Tarr; in Hungarian).

BAM ROSE CINEMAS
30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-636-4100)—Through March 30: "Graham Greene Noir." Feb. 28 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "This Gun for Hire" (1942, Frank Tuttle). The 6:50 screening will be followed by a discussion with the critic Elliott Stein. ♦ "Brooklyn Close-Up." March 1 at 4:30 and 7: "Home" (2006, Dawn Scibilia). The 7:30 screening will be followed by a Q. & A. with the director. ♦ "Pimps, Prostitutes and Pigs," the films of Shohei Imamura. March 2-4 at 1:20, 4, 6:50, and 9:40; March 5 at 4 and 8:30; and March 6 at 4, 6:50, and 9:40: "Vengeance Is Mine" (1979; in Japanese). ♦ March 5 at 6:50: "Nishi Ginza Station" (1958; in Japanese).

FILM FORUM
W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—"R.K.O. Lost and Found." Feb. 28-March 1 at 1, 4:05, 7:10, and 10:15: "A Man to Remember" (1938, Garson Kanin). ♦ Feb. 28-March 1 at 2:35, 5:40, and 8:45: "Stingaree" (1934, William A. Wellman). ♦ In revival. March 1-6: "Raise the Red Lantern" (1991, Zhang Yimou; in Mandarin).

FRENCH INSTITUTE ALLIANCE FRANÇAISE
Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. (212-355-6160)—Through March 27: "French Seventies: Cinema After May '68." March 6 at 12:30, 4, and 7: "The Devil Probably" (†). The 7 P.M. screening will be followed by a discussion with the director Benoît Jacquot and the critic and editor Jean-Michel Frodon, moderated by Sam Di Iorio, of Hunter College.

IFC CENTER
323 Sixth Ave., at W. 3rd St. (212-924-7771)—"Rendez-Vous with French Cinema." All films are in French. March 2 at 6:45 and 9:30: "The Singer" (2006, Xavier Giannoli). ♦ March 3 at noon and March 4 at 2:45: "Countdown" (2007, Sandrine Veysset). ♦ March 3 at 2 and 10:15: "Inside Paris" (2006, Christophe Honoré). ♦ March 3 at 4 and 8:15: "The Page Turner" (2006, Denis Dercourt). ♦ March 3 at 6 and March 6 at 7: "Flanders" (2006, Bruno Dumont). ♦ March 4 at 4:45 and 9:15: "The Man of My Life" (2006, Zabou Breitman). ♦ March 4 at 7:15 and March 6 at 9:30: "Blame It on Fidel" (2006, Julie Gavras). ♦ March 5 at 7 and 9:30: "Ambitious" (2006, Catherine Corsini). ♦ New York Children's Film Festival. March 4 at noon: "Call Me Elisabeth" (2006, Jean-Pierre Améris). ♦ March 4 at 12:30: "The Ugly Duckling and Me!" (2006, Michael Hegner and Karsten Killerich). For complete program information, go to www.gkids.com.

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9480)—"Pictures in Print: Lillian Ross and the Movies." Feb. 28 at 7: "The Boston Strangler" (1968, Richard Fleischer). ♦ "Documentary Fortnight Expanded." Feb. 28 at 8:30: "War Hospital" (2005, David Christensen and Damien Lewis). ♦ Through March 26: The films of Abbas Kiarostami. All films are in Farsi. March 1 at 7: "Taste of Cherry" (1997) and "Birth of Light" (1997), introduced by the director. ♦ March 2 at 6: Short films, including "The Experience" (1973). ♦ March 2 at 8: "The Traveller" (1974) and short films. ♦ March 3 at 2: Short films, including "The Wedding Suit" (1976). ♦ March 3 at 4:15: Short films, including "Orderly or Disorderly" (1981). ♦ March 4 at 2: "First-Graders" (1984). ♦ March 4 at 4: "Where Is the Friend's House?" (1987). ♦ March 4 at 6: "Homework" (1989). ♦ March 5 at 6: "Close-Up" (1990). ♦ March 5 at 8: "And Life Goes On . . ." (1990). ♦ The films of Valie Export. March 3-4 at 2: Short films, including "Body Tape" (1970). ♦ March 3-4 at 4:30: "The Practice of Love" (1984; in German). ♦ March 3 at 6:30 and March 5 at 8:30: "Invisible Adversaries" (1976; in German).

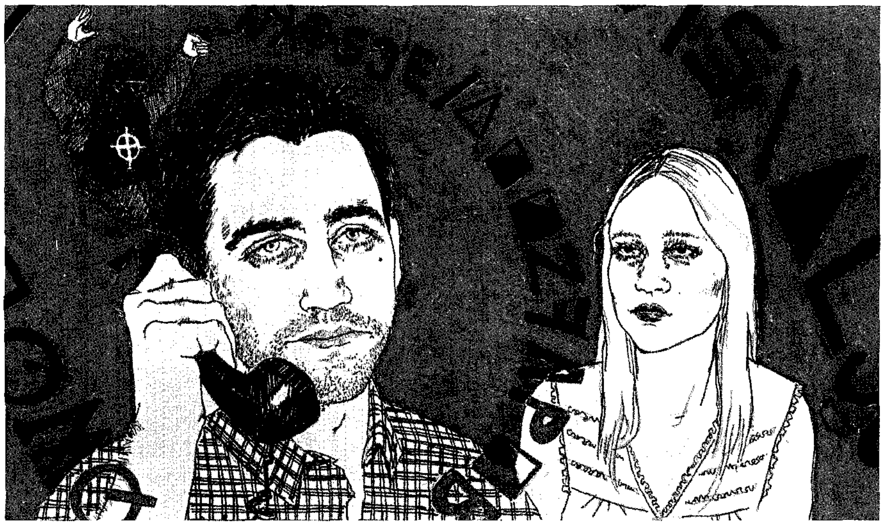
MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE
35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—Special screenings. March 3 at 2: "Out 1," episodes 1-4 (1971, Jacques Rivette; in French). ♦ March 4 at 2: "Out 1," episodes 5-8 (1971, Rivette; in French). Box dinner available for both days (call 718-784-4520). ♦ March 6 at 7:30: "Offside" (2006, Jafar Panahi; in Farsi), introduced by the director.

NEW YORK ARAB AND SOUTH ASIAN FILM FESTIVAL
Tribeca Cinemas, 54 Varick St., and other venues (212-967-4318). Selected screenings. March 2 at 6: "Leisure Time" (2006, Mohamed Mostafa; in Arabic). ♦ March 3 at 5:30: "Anuranan: The Resonance" (2006, Aniruddha Roy Chowdhury; in Bengali). ♦ March 4 at 9:30: "These Girls" (2006, Tahani Rached; in Arabic). For complete program information, go to www.alwanforthearts.org/filmfestival.

NEW YORK INTERNATIONAL CHILDREN'S FILM FESTIVAL
Director's Guild of America Theatre, 110 W. 57th St., and other venues (212-349-0330). March 2 at 6: "U" (2006, Grégoire Solotareff and Serge Elissalde). For complete program information, go to www.gkids.com.

PIONEER THEATRE
155 E. 3rd St. (212-591-0434)—In première. Feb. 28 at 7 and 9: Films from the Red Shift Festival. For complete program information, visit www.rsfest.com.

RUBIN MUSEUM OF ART
150 W. 17th St. (212-620-5000, ext. 344)—Special screening. Feb. 28 at 7: "Three Holy Rivers" (2004, Catherine Berge; in French and English), followed by a discussion with James Ivory and Madhur Jaffrey. ♦ "Cabaret Cinema." March 2 at 9:30: "Lost Horizon" (1973, Charles Jarrott), with live running commentary by Michael Musto.



Jake Gyllenhaal and Chloë Sevigny in David Fincher's serial-killer drama "Zodiac."

HOPE GANGLOFF

SUNSHINE CINEMA
143 E. Houston St. (212-330-8182)—"Sunshine@Midnight." March 2-3: "Conan the Barbarian" (†).

THALIA THEATRE
Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. (212-864-5400)—In revival. March 4 at 1 and 5:30: "The Rules of the Game" (1939, Jean Renoir; in French). ♦ New York International Children's Film Festival. March 4 at 3:30: Short films of works by Dr. Seuss, including "The 500 Hats of Bartholomew Cubbins" (1943, George Pal).

WALTER READE THEATRE
Lincoln Center (212-875-5600)—"Rendez-Vous with French Cinema." All films are in French. Feb. 28 at 8: "La Vie en Rose" (2007, Olivier Dahan). ♦ March 1 at 1 and 6:15 and March 3 at 1:30: "The Singer" (2006, Xavier Giannoli). ♦ March 1 at 3:45 and 9 and March 6 at 6:15: "Inside Paris" (2006, Christophe Honoré). ♦ March 2 at 1 and 6:15 and March 4 at 9: "The Page Turner" (2006, Denis Dercourt). ♦ March 2 at 3:15, March 3 at 6:45, and March 4 at

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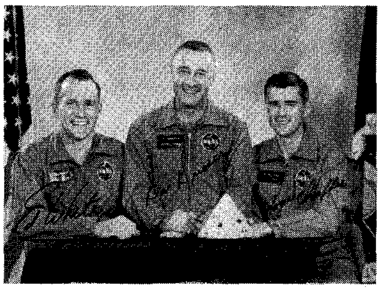

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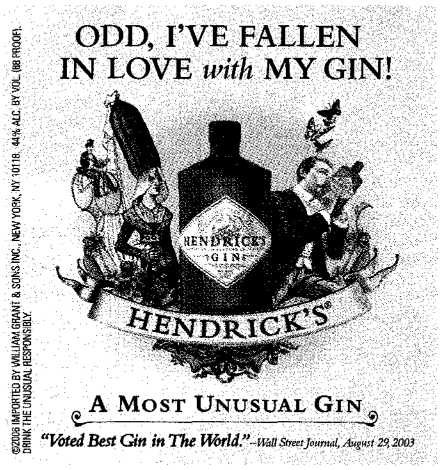

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1:30: "Tell No One" (2006, Guillaume Canet). ♦ March 2 at 8:30 and March 6 at 3:15 and 8:45: "Countdown" (2007, Sandrine Veysset) and "Humbert Balsan: Rebel Producer" (2006, Anne Andreu). ♦ March 3 at 4 and March 5 at 1:30 and 6:15: "The Man of My Life" (2006, Zabou Breitman). ♦ March 3 at 9:30, March 4 at 4:15, and March 6 at 1: "Ambitious" (2006, Catherine Corsini). ♦ March 4 at 6:30 and March 5 at 3:45 and 9: "Flanders" (2006, Bruno Dumont).

READINGS AND TALKS

KENNETH HELPHAND
Wave Hill, the cultural center in the Bronx, presents the author of "Defiant Gardens: Making Gardens in Wartime," who will talk about the horticultural efforts of soldiers, including those currently stationed in Iraq. (New York School of Interior Design, 170 E. 70th St. For information about tickets, call 718-549-3200, ext. 216. Feb. 28 at 6:30.)

KGB BAR
The online literary journal Anderbo.com presents the comedic writer Jeff Clinkenbeard, the poet and playwright Laconia Koerner, and the writer Erika Recordon. (85 E. 4th St. No tickets necessary. Feb. 28 at 7.)

"ART AS ANECDOTE"
Sarah Schmerler, the curator of this exhibit about the daily routines of contemporary artists, talks about the photographs, notes, and ephemera on display. (Brooklyn Arts Council Gallery, 111 Front St., Dumbo. For more information, call 718-625-0080. March 1 at 6.)

NATHANIEL BELLOWS
The poet reads from his début collection, "Why Speak?" (McNally Robinson Booksellers, 52 Prince St. No tickets necessary. March 1 at 7.)

ROBERT FISK
The Middle East correspondent for the British newspaper *The Independent* talks about politics, wars, and civil unrest. (Town Hall, 123 W. 43rd St. 212-307-4100. March 4 at 7.)

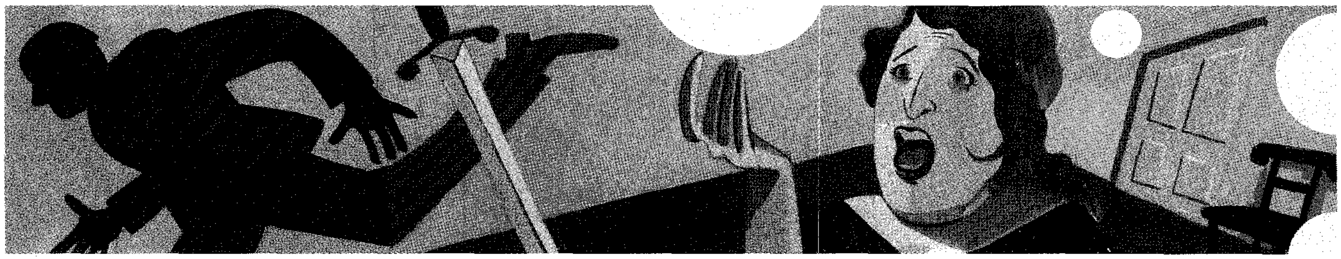
FRENCH INSTITUTE ALLIANCE FRANÇAISE
Following a screening of "The Devil Probably," which is part of the institute's series "French Seventies: Cinema After May '68," the director Benoît Jacquot joins the editor in chief of *Les Cahiers du Cinéma*, Jean-Michel Frodon, and the Hunter College professor Sam Di Iorio for a discussion. In English. (See also Movies.) (55 E. 59th St. 212-307-4100. March 6 at 7.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

MIRANDA JULY
The filmmaker and performance artist, whose 2005 feature, "Me and You and Everyone We Know," revolved around a lonely shoe salesman and an artist whose day job is driving a taxi for the elderly, presents her latest multimedia project, "Things We Don't Understand and Definitely Are Not Going to Talk About." (The Kitchen, 512 W. 19th St. 212-255-5793, ext. 111. March 1-4 at 8.)

"ART IS OTHERWISE"
Last fall, the author Toni Morrison curated a multidisciplinary festival at the Louvre addressing the themes of national identity, immigration, and exile. Starting this week, she brings the action Stateside with a four-day gathering. It opens on March 5 at 7 with a lecture by Morrison. (French Institute Alliance Française, 55 E. 59th St. 212-355-6160.) March 6-7: The U.S. première of William Forsythe's "You Made Me a Monster." (See Dance.) (Baryshnikov Arts Center, Howard Gilman Performance Space, 450 W. 37th St. 212-279-4200.) March 7 at 6: Morrison talks with Forsythe about the work. (Baryshnikov Arts Center.) March 8 at 8: Morrison joins the Alliance Players for an evening of chamber music centered on the theme of exile. (Baryshnikov Arts Center.)

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES
Sotheby's exhibit of original paintings (Feb. 23-March 10) commissioned for the label of each vintage of the iconic Château Mouton Rothschild, created by such twentieth-century giants as Miró, Picasso, Motherwell, and Balthus, whets the palate for a large auction of bottles from the private cellar of Baroness Philippine de Rothschild on Feb. 28. These include a Nebuchadnezzar (fifteen-litre) bottle from 2000, a single bottle from 1887, and five lots from the 2005 vintage, which are still mellowing out in barrels on the family estate. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 212-606-7000.) ♦ Also on Feb. 28, **Christie's** holds one of its semiannual "First Open" sales of postwar and contemporary art for the next generation of collectors; this round features works by Chris Ofili and Hiroshi Sugimoto, as well as a mobile by Alexander Calder. (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.) ♦ **Swann** presents works on paper and prints and drawings from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries on March 6, including an aquatint by Dégas ("Deux Danseuses") and two bathing beauties by Renoir, one a lithograph and the other a pastel counterproof. (104 E. 25th St. 212-254-4710.)



ZOHAR LAZAR

ON THE HORIZON

DANCE
ABOUT A BOY
March 14-31

Tim Burton's "Edward Scissorhands," a fairy tale about a sweet, unhappy boy with sharp blades for fingers, is translated into dance-theatre by Michael Bourne, the choreographer who brought us a "Swan Lake" populated with male swans. (718-636-4100.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
A THOUSAND SHIPS
March 15

Deborah Voigt has always had the vocal heft to sing Strauss well, but her newly slim physique should make her interpretation of the title role of "The Egyptian Helen," a rarity that the Met is mounting for her, especially convincing. (212-362-6000.)

MOVIES
A GOOD FIT
March 17-25

Movies have always both reflected and influenced the sartorial styles of their time. Moving Image's "Fashion in Film" festival celebrates the connection between the two art forms by showing such documentaries as "Paris Is Burning," "Unzipped," and Frederick Wiseman's "Model" alongside Hitchcock's "Rear Window," Buñuel's "Diary of a Chambermaid," the cult classic "Liquid Sky," and short films from before the First World War. (718-784-0077.)

ART
CANAL ZONE
March 27-July 8

For centuries, Venice was a bustling port that straddled the divide between Europe and the East, and the city's decorative arts, painting, and sculpture bore the marks of the cultures that converged there. The Met's "Venice and the Islamic World, 828-1797" reveals how stylistic flourishes from Egypt, Turkey, and Iran were picked up by artists and artisans working in the Italian city. (212-535-7710.)

NIGHT LIFE
PLAYING THE WORLD
March 30

The Malian kora master Toumani Diabaté brings his highly polished Symmetric Orchestra to Zankel Hall, giving New Yorkers a taste of the sharp grooves that have filled his weekly all-night sets in Bamako over the past decade. (212-247-7800.)

Deborah Voigt in "The Egyptian Helen," at the Met.

winter **showcase**

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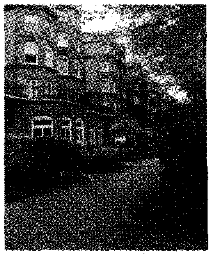

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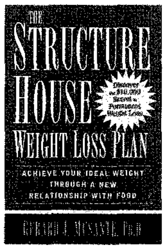
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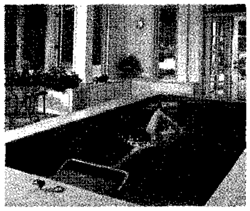

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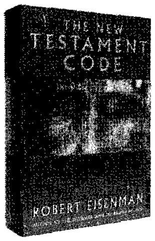

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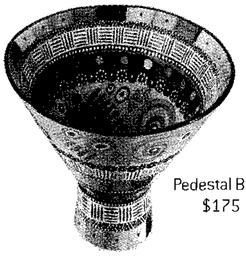

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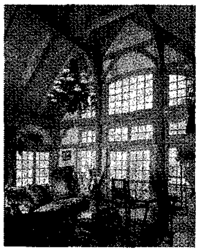

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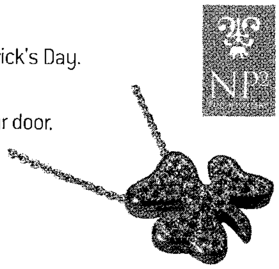

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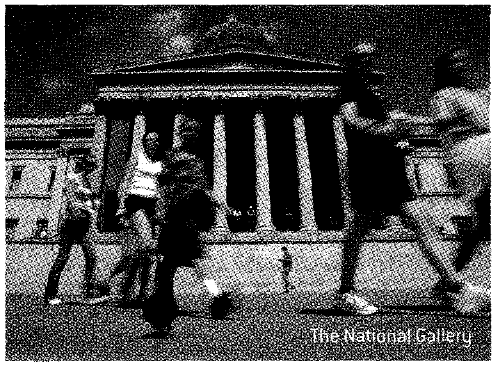
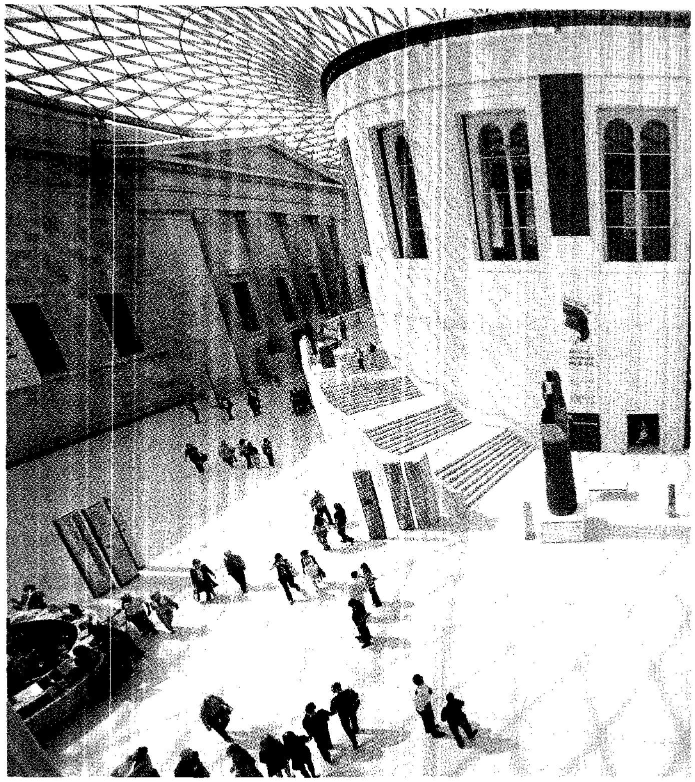
LONDON IS RIFE WITH STELLAR MUSEUMS AND GALLERIES. HOW DO ART LOVERS CHOOSE WHICH EXHIBITIONS TO SEE?

While every major city has a great museum or two for culture-seeking travelers, none can rival London for the breadth and accessibility of its historic and contemporary art. At the city's artistic heart are such heavy hitters as the National Gallery, the Royal Academy, and the National Portrait Gallery—all offering stunning temporary exhibitions that complement their permanent collections. But the journey shouldn't end there: art lovers can also have rewarding experiences in smaller galleries, such as White Cube and the Whitechapel Gallery, which reflect the vibrancy of contemporary art. Other museums such as the Dulwich Picture Gallery have remarkable collections of European Old Masters.

To simplify your efforts at seeing London's best, begin at the galleries with the most compelling temporary exhibitions. One of the art season's highlights has to be the show dedicated to works of William Hogarth at **Tate Britain** (now through April 29th). Hogarth can lay claim to being the country's first truly modern artist, something that is a good fit for Tate Britain, a museum dedicated to British art across the ages. Hogarth's images of eighteenth-century England in all its squalid, inglorious detail offer a thrilling wake-up call to anyone accustomed to mild-mannered Merry Olde England.


The National Gallery

Across the Thames, curators at the **Dulwich Picture Gallery** have produced an exhibition that reveals a more classically serene Britain, with "Canaletto in England" (through April 15th). Here, we have London's gorgeously precise Georgian-era atmosphere. Canaletto, the Venetian painter who was born Giovanni Antonio Canal, lived in England from 1746 to 1755. Because many of the works in this exhibition are privately owned, "Canaletto in England" is a rare chance to see a different side to the artist—in one of Great Britain's best small galleries.



The collected works at the National Portrait Gallery offer visitors great insight into how the British have seen themselves since the fourteenth century. For the museum's spring exhibition, "Between Worlds: Voyagers to Britain 1700–1850," however, the National Portrait Gallery takes a look at those who traveled to London from distant British colonies. (In those days, when travel was difficult and much of the world was still new, tourists from far-flung places could cause great excitement.) The exhibition runs from March 8th through June 17th.

Two other exhibitions in 2007 explore Britain's relationship with its former colonies. At **The British Museum**, "A New World: England's First View of America" (March 15th through June 17th) includes seventy watercolors made by John White while on voyages to Virginia in the fifteen-eighties. These Elizabethan paintings gave the British public many of their first glimpses of the New World. Likewise, at the **Museum in Docklands**, "Journey to the New World: London 1606 to Virginia 1607" (through May 13th) marks the 400th anniversary of the first permanent English settlement in America at Jamestown.

A breed apart are the blockbuster shows. One such world-class exhibition at the **National Gallery** will be dedicated to Auguste Renoir's landscapes (February 21st through May 20th). At the **Royal Academy** a survey of portraiture during the Enlightenment, "Citizens and Kings: Portraits in the Age of Revolution, 1760–1830" will run through April 20th. The Royal Academy is also presenting "The Unknown Monet: Pastels and Drawings" (March 17 through June 10), which will unlock the skilled draftsmanship behind Monet's dreamy Impressionism. And at **Tate Modern**, there will be a major retrospective of the works of the controversial contemporary duo Gilbert & George (February 15-May 7). The 200 works there will be sure to evoke praise and criticism in equal measure.

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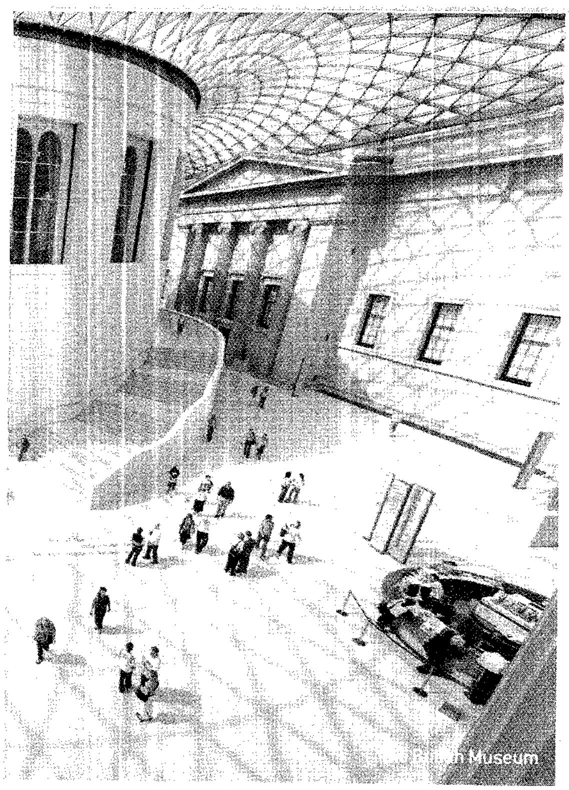

It's a Surreal World

"Surreal Things: Surrealism & Design" at **The Victoria and Albert Museum** will examine the impact of Surrealism on architecture, design, and the decorative arts. *From March 29th to July 22nd, be sure to look for such classics as the Salvador Dalí sofa modeled in the form of Mae West's lips and Oscar Dominguez's satin-lined wheelbarrow.*

Tate Modern will begin its exploration of the role of cinema in Dalí's work with more than a hundred pieces in "Dalí and Film," from June 1st through September 9th. This will be the first time that Dalí's paintings will be seen alongside his films.

County Hall Gallery is home to the Dalí Universe, a glorious permanent exhibition containing more than 500 works by the artist, all in a *dreamlike labyrinth of galleries.* Such an experience places participants in the heart of a surreal fantasyland.

Saatchi Gallery

Spotlight on London's Specialized Galleries

New Digs for the Saatchi...

For more than twenty years, the advertising leader Charles Saatchi has been mounting exhibitions of the artworks he has collected. His influential exhibitions were largely responsible for the rise to fame of the so-called Young British Artists (or YBAs) such as Damien Hirst, Jenny Saville, and Rachel Whiteread. They have arguably changed the way people view art.

This summer, the Saatchi Gallery is moving to a new location, the imposing, 50,000-square-foot Duke of York's Headquarters on King's Road in Chelsea. The gallery is sure to become a major attraction beginning with its inaugural show, "The Triumph of Painting," in which Saatchi turns his back on the multimedia works of the YBAs he so famously championed. As Saatchi's taste has evolved, so the visitor has had the opportunity to see works from both new and established artists that might otherwise have never been exhibited.

... Four Galleries Wowing Art Lovers Now.

WHITE CUBE

25–26 Mason's Yard

Art dealer Jay Jopling's White Cube opened in September, 2006, and it's the first freestanding building to be built in the St. James's area for more than thirty years. The gallery's sleek simplicity is similar to the Hoxton White Cube—and it's worth visiting *for the building's architecture alone.* (Its site was previously an electrical substation.) Jopling has been as influential as anyone in bringing contemporary art to the forefront in Britain, often selling to mega-collectors such as Charles Saatchi. Look out for the works of Anselm Kiefer at Mason's Yard, showing until March 17, 2007.

GEFFRYE MUSEUM

Kingsland Road

It's always fascinating to see how others live. The *wonderful Geffrye* Museum gives one a chance to view the interiors of English middle-class *living rooms. Its displays lead the visitor* on a walk through time, from the oak furniture and paneling of the seventeenth century, on through Georgian splendor, to today's sleek modernity. The museum is set in a group of elegant eighteenth-century almshouses. There is also a contemporary wing surrounded by attractive gardens, including an award-winning walled herb garden and a series of period gardens.

THE QUEEN'S GALLERY

Buckingham Palace

Should Britain one day become a *republic* (*it's* a constitutional monarchy at present, thank you), the country would get its hands on a remarkable collection of art that is now in the possession of The Queen. Many of these works are on display at The Queen's Gallery adjacent to Buckingham Palace. In 2007, a large selection of The Queen's Italian masterpieces will be hung in the gallery for an exhibition devoted to the Renaissance and Baroque art of Italy (March 30th through January 20th, 2008).

WHITECHAPEL GALLERY

80–82 Whitechapel High Street

The original purpose of the Whitechapel Gallery was "to fill the minds of the people with thoughts to exclude those created by gloom or sordid temptation," and for a hundred years this bright space in London's East End has been succeeding. Particularly popular among artists for its exquisite, church-like high ceilings, the Whitechapel has played host to some of the most celebrated works of art in the world, including Picasso's "Guernica" and Pollock's "Blue Poles." Located in a gallery-filled area, the Whitechapel is a must for any visitor.

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THE
NEW YORKER

THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT
PARTY TALK

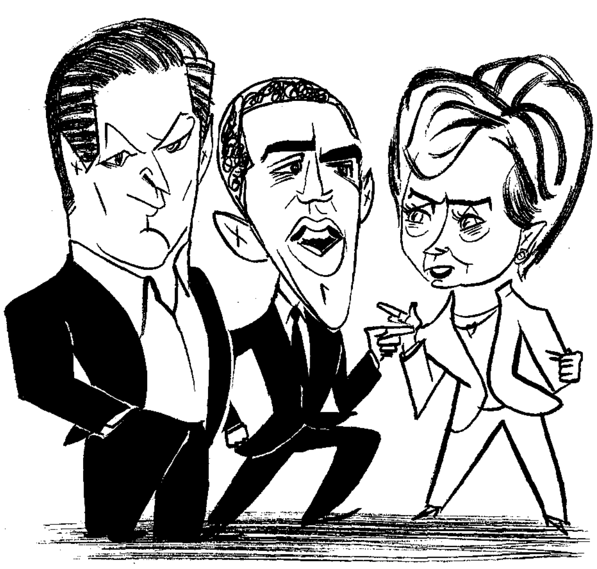
“Saturday Night Live” is erratic in middle age but rarely cruel. An exception came late last spring, when, at the stroke of eleven-thirty, an NBC announcer gravely told the American people to stand by for a “message from the President of the United States,” and Al Gore, surrounded by Oval Office knickknacks, came into focus to deliver what could best be described as an interim report from a parallel, and happier, galaxy. President Gore reviewed some of his actions and their unintended consequences:

> In the last six years we have been able to stop global warming. No one could have predicted the negative results of this. Glaciers that once were melting are now on the attack. As you know, these renegade glaciers have already captured parts of upper Michigan and northern Maine. But I assure you: we will not let the glaciers win.

Nor was this the only problem. Although Social Security had been repaired, the cost had been high: the budget surplus was “down to a perilously low eleven trillion dollars.” The price of gas had dropped to nineteen cents a gallon, and the oil companies were hurting. (“I know that I am partly to blame by insisting that cars run on trash.”) After winning the plaudits of a grateful world—and turning Afghanistan into a premier “spring-break destination”—Americans could no longer risk travelling abroad, for fear of “getting hugged.” Even the national pastime was in danger. “But,” Gore added hopefully, “I have faith in baseball commissioner George W. Bush when he says, ‘We will find the steroid users if we have to tap every phone in America!’ ”

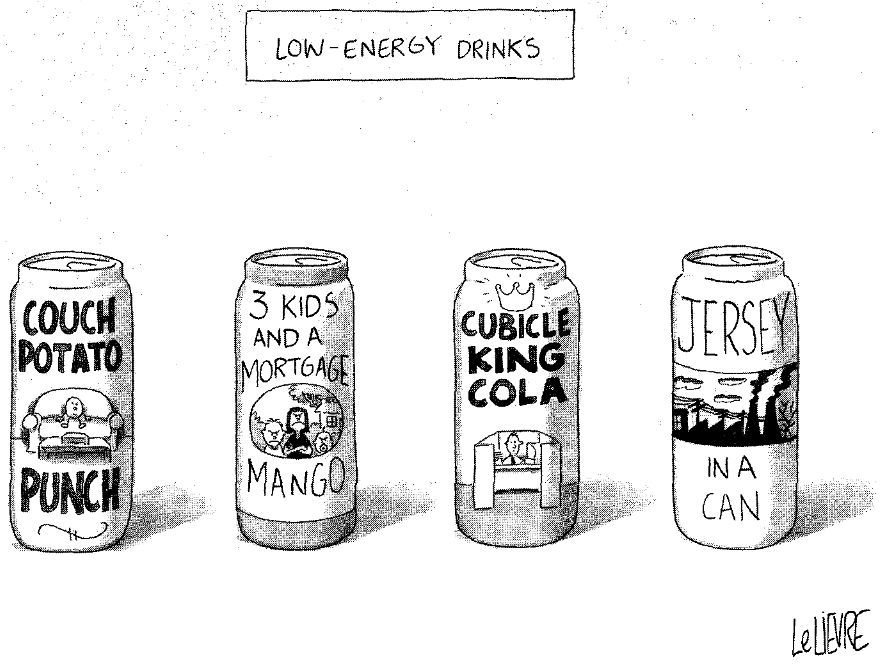
The cruelty here was not to Gore, who probably requires no prompting to brood now and then about what might have been, but to the audience. It is worse than painful to reflect on how much better off the United States and the world would be today if the outcome of the 2000 election had been permitted to correspond with the wishes of the electorate. The attacks of September 11, 2001, would likely not have been avoided, though there is ample evidence, in the 9/11 Commission report and elsewhere, that Gore and his circle were far more alert to the threat of Islamist terrorism than Bush and his. But can anyone seriously doubt that a Gore Administration would have meant, well, an alternate universe, in which, say, American troops were sent on a necessary mission in Afghanistan but not on a mistaken and misbegotten one in Iraq; the fate of the earth, not the fate of oil-company executives, was the priority of the Environmental Protection Agency; civil liberties and diplomacy were subjects of attention rather than of derision; torture found no place or rationale?

In increasing numbers, poll results imply, Americans are disheartened by the real and existing Presidency, and no small number also feel regret that Gore—the winner in 2000 of the popular vote by more than half a million ballots, the almost certain winner of any reasonable or consistent count in the state of Florida—ended up the target of what it is not an exaggeration to call a judicial coup d’état. Justice Antonin Scalia routinely instructs those who question his vote in Bush v. Gore to stop their ceaseless whinging. “It’s water over the deck,” he told an audience at Iona College last month. “Get over it.” But it is neither possible nor wise to “get over it.” The historical damage is too profound.



And yet, despite the burden of

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL



injury and injustice, Gore, more than any other major Democratic Party figure, including the many candidates assembled for next year's Presidential nomination, has demonstrated in opposition precisely the quality of judgment that Bush has lacked in office. Gore's critiques of the Administration's rush to war in Iraq and of the deceptions used to justify it were early, brave, and correct. On the issue of climate change, of course, he has exercised visionary leadership. With humor and intelligence, and negligible self-pity, he dispensed with the temptations of political martyrdom and became a global Jeremiah. Beginning in the nineteen-eighties, he waged what was at first a fairly lonely campaign to draw attention to the problem; now, as a popularizing propagandist, he has succeeded in registering it as a crisis with nearly everyone, from field-tripping schoolchildren to reality-dubious members of the Administration. With his documentary film, "An Inconvenient Truth," Gore made the undeniability of the crisis a matter of consensus; thanks largely to him, an environmental issue will be an electoral issue. His secular evangelism has earned him an honored night at the Academy Awards and—almost as glittering—a nomination for the Nobel Peace Prize.

For the moment, Gore has absented himself from the 2008 Presidential race with a deliberately provisional explanation: He has no *plans* to be a candidate. He doesn't *expect* to be a candidate. (Or, as he satirized his language for Jay Leno when talking about his future in the movies, "I just want to clarify: I have no *plans* to do a nude scene. I have no *intention* to do a nude scene. I don't *expect* to do a nude scene. But I haven't made a Shermanesque statement about it.")

Gore's reluctance is understandable. The balloting in Iowa and New Hampshire is nearly a year away. He is in no rush. He may have shared Bill Clinton's love of policymaking but not his relish for full-immersion politicking. In the view of former aides still close to him, Gore can't lose by staying on the electoral sidelines. While Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama start competing—warily at first, and then, inevitably, taking direct aim at one another's weaknesses—Gore can stand unbruised, nursing the lingering glamour of his popular margin in 2000 and, perhaps, demanding by quiet inference that we take stock of a distinguished public career that began three decades ago, when Gore was a twenty-eight-year-old Vietnam veteran freshly elected to Congress.

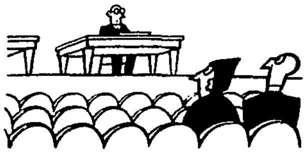
If only to take an honest man's word for it, Gore's entry into the race is unlikely. Clinton, Obama, Bill Richardson, John Edwards, Joseph Biden, Christopher Dodd—the field already provides a pool of talent and a range of possibilities infinitely more encouraging than the status quo. Moreover, the nomination and election of any one of the first three would take America a long way toward keeping the unfulfilled promise of "We the people"—not least because the appeal of all three is based only incidentally upon gender, race, or ethnic heritage.

If the next few months produce an obvious and relatively intact nominee, fine. Gore can stay active in his new role, and perhaps carry that role further, as a kind of climate czar in a Democratic Administration. But, as someone once said, stuff happens. The campaign may get nasty quickly. Clinton's Iraq position may prove untenable in any of its iterations. Obama's youthful charisma may look like inexperience after prolonged exposure to electoral gamesmanship. David Geffen might grow claws. A year is a very long time in politics, especially in the circular shooting contests that the Democrats so often convene.

There will still be Gore, patient and untrammelled. In any case, he will not have embarrassed himself. Post-lockbox, he has developed a keener sense of that. When the writers at "Saturday Night Live" suggested that he take part in a sketch featuring some scatological themes, Gore demurred with a combination of ironic self-preservation and his customary good judgment. "I'm sure this is funny," he said, "but at the end of this I want to have some bread crumbs left leading back to my dignity."

—*David Remnick*

THE BOARDS
SHADES OF GRAY



Spalding Gray, a naked man who wore chinos and long-sleeved shirts, usually with the cuffs rolled up, last appeared onstage in New York in December, 2003. He once told an interviewer, "When people say to me, 'What do you do?' I say, 'I tell stories from my life.' They say, 'You must have a very interesting life.' 'No,' I say. 'But I tell it well.' " His standard props included—along with a table, a chair, and a glass of water—a spiral notebook. Often, his monologues had paradoxical emotional and sensory effects upon audiences. Not the least of these was that he possessed such an immediate, arresting presence—he lived in quest of what he called "perfect moments"—that it was possible to forget that his meandering delivery depended upon words he had committed to the page with obsessive precision. Was he principally a writer or an actor? In one of his unpublished journals, he described himself as a "collagist taking bits and scraps from the growing heap of my life."

After Gray's suicide—he drowned at sixty-two, probably by jumping from the Staten Island Ferry, in January, 2004, two and a half years after being severely injured in an automobile accident—his literary estate included a number of unpublished journals. (Gray never learned to type and was also dyslexic.) Almost two years later, his widow, Kathleen Russo, a theatrical agent, and Lucy Sexton, a performance artist, spent a weekend in Sag Harbor, where Gray and Russo lived with their three children, and began reading his diaries. (From 1969: "I often feel lost in the essence of a day, the mild wind and easy clouds, the graceful easy white ass of day, that I want nothing more than to become a leaf, not to write about it, but to do nothing, to be taken in and bathed.") The result, originally presented at P.S. 122 last June, to celebrate Gray's sixty-fifth birthday, was a four-night run of selected readings from his journals and monologues. This week, a refined version of "Spalding Gray: Stories Left to Tell" opens at the Minetta Lane Theatre.

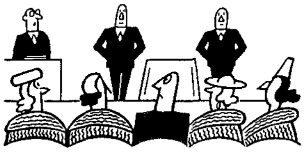
Early on, Russo and Sexton decided that the surest way to bring Gray's writing to life was to encourage actors to present it in their own voices. During a rehearsal in a studio near Times Square, a couple of weeks before the opening, one had only to see the actors—Kathleen Chalfant, Frank Wood, Hazelle Goodman, Ryan West, and Ain Gordon—to get the point: not one remotely look-alike or sound-alike on the premises. Still, while the other actors move about the stage, Gordon, who has the designated role of Journal Reader, stays seated at a table, with a glass of water and a notebook. Gordon is built like Gray, long-limbed and lean, but the resemblance ends there. He has dark hair, an angular face, and speaks in the clipped tempo of a New York City guy rather than, as Gray was, a transplanted Rhode Islander. "I can't be creative without being self-destructive," his character says, "because I'm like Humpty Dumpty—there are two 'me's deeply built in."

After the rehearsal, Gordon mentioned that he had made a point of not watching any of the filmed versions of Gray's monologues but that, in 2002, he had performed one of his own monologues for a benefit at P.S. 122, on a bill that included Gray. "Afterward, Spalding came up and shook my hand and was very gracious to me," he said. "So the least I could do was return the favor."

He continued, "I don't consider myself an actor. I'm a writer. I write plays, but my work has no similarity to Spalding's. I haven't appeared in anyone else's work since college. When we began this project, they said, 'We'd like you to read the journal entries.' I thought that was good. I'm his offstage self—a writer playing a writer. Because they placed me at the desk, I'm very much talking to the audience rather than performing. If there's any carrying forth of Spalding's style, it's because the writing is telling me what to do. The rest is accidental."

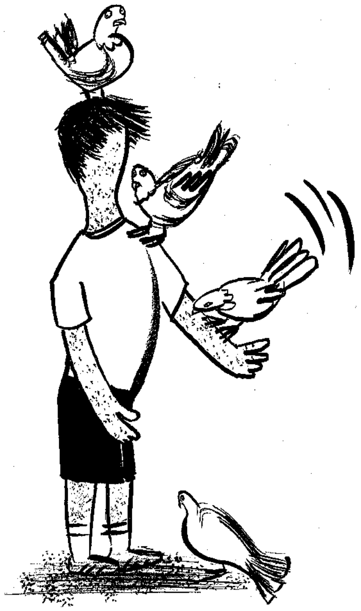
—*Mark Singer*

ON THE BLOCK
PECKED



When Amy Cappellazzo, the international co-head of postwar and contemporary art at Christie's, secured a sale of selections from the Pierre Huber collection, one of the pieces about which she was most enthusiastic was "Flying Rats," by the French-Algerian artist Kader Attia. It consists of a hundred-and-fifty-square-foot cage, a couple of dozen figures of children molded from birdseed, and a hundred and fifty hungry pigeons. "It was at the Lyons Biennial in 2005, and everyone who saw it said it was the showstopper," Cappellazzo said recently, as she watched the work being set up on the auction house's twentieth floor. "It was the only one you walked away from changed, and that is what you want from an art experience—to be changed."

A row of synthetic wigs in disconcertingly small sizes were arrayed on the concrete floor, as were various shorts and T-shirts fit for five- or six-year-olds. A couple of Attia's assistants were working their way through a sack of birdseed with a coffee grinder, mixing the ground seed with water and flour to make a paste. "We're having a little issue with the consistency of the seed," Cappellazzo said. Another pair of assistants smeared birdseed paste onto child-shaped metal armatures. The finished figures—faceless, but wearing sneakers—looked like characters from a Comedy Central series aimed at macabre-minded teen-agers. The pigeons would be feasting upon the model children for only six days, rather than the two months of the Lyons Biennial, but Cappellazzo anticipated that the desired effect would nonetheless take place. "They are definitely going to look as if they'd been violently accosted," she said.



"Flying Rats"

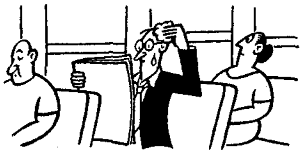
The work, which Cappellazzo described as "being about the innocence of childhood as something that is elusive and phantomlike," goes on sale this week, for a price estimated at between sixty thousand and eighty thousand dollars. The buyer receives neither cage nor birds nor birdseed children but a certificate permitting the future staging of the work, along with a series of photographs of the Lyons installation. The cost to Christie's of building the coop, buying eight hundred and twenty-five pounds of birdseed, and hiring the birds has been about equal to the estimated purchase price.

To install the work, permission had to be obtained from Tishman Speyer, the auction house's landlord. "We reminded them that Radio City Music Hall"—another Tishman Speyer property—"has a lot of animals for the Christmas show, so it was not unprecedented," Jeffrey Kuduk, Christie's director of general services and construction, said. Tishman Speyer agreed, on the condition that it be indemnified against damages. "It's all about the shit, and the smell of the shit," Cappellazzo said. "It's not that they are going to peck your eyes out. We said, how much can they shit in six days? It's like an extended sleepover." The birds were supplied by a Bronx company called 33rd and Bird. "They had already done something in a private house with two hundred and fifty macaws," Cappellazzo said, "but this is by far the largest project with pigeons."

While there has been institutional enthusiasm for the work, a few of Cappellazzo's colleagues have responded to the pigeons with repugnance. "People have very emotional feelings about pigeons," she said. "It's like Hitchcock's 'The Birds.' If you told people it was singing canaries, it would be different." Last week, on the pigeons' first night on the premises, Cappellazzo hosted a dinner to celebrate the impending sale of "Flying Rats" and other works. These include a piece by the artist Jim Shaw called "The Donner Party," which refers both to Judy Chicago's "The Dinner Party" and to America's most notorious case of cannibalism. The themed menu called for carpaccio served atop slices of log. "But not squab," Cappellazzo said. "I think it would be too weird to be sitting here eating pigeon."

—Rebecca Mead

J'ACCUSE DEPT.
KOBE BEEF



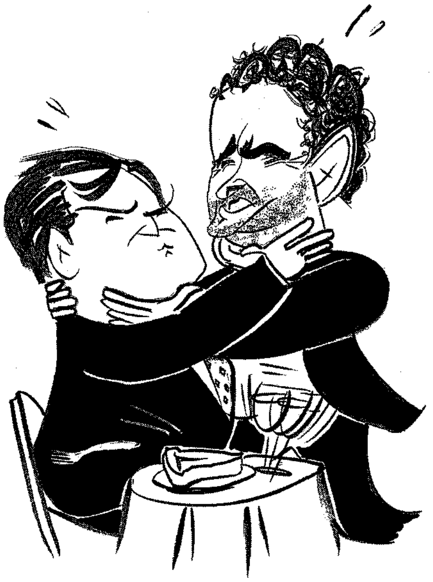
Most mornings, Frank Bruni brews a pot of coffee and reads the online edition of the *Times* at his apartment, on the Upper West Side. Bruni, the paper's chief restaurant critic, had been warned that last Wednesday's Dining In section would contain an unusual advertisement. "I thought, Oh, yeah, this is the morning it's going to be out," he said recently, "so I went over to Starbucks, and got a paper." There it was, on F-9: a full-page letter, addressed to the section's editor, from the restaurateur Jeffrey Chodorow. Chodorow had paid almost forty thousand dollars for the ad, including a premium for its placement, directly across from Bruni's weekly column. In the course of seven paragraphs, he accused the *Times* of an ad-hominem vendetta, assailed Bruni's credentials—"Mr. Bruni comes to us from Rome where he was not the local 'expert' on Italian cuisine; he wrote about politics"—and announced the launch of a personal blog, which would include a feature entitled "Following Frank."

Chodorow's grudge stemmed from Bruni's February 7th zero-star review of Kobe Club, his samurai-inspired steak house. "Although Kobe Club does right by the fabled flesh for which it's named, it presents too many insipid or insulting dishes at prices that draw blood from anyone without a trust fund or an expense account," Bruni had written.

"He just seemed like he picked on the smallest things," Chodorow said last week, from Las Vegas. "The potatoes were 'gluey'—they weren't! They were freshly made." He went on, "There were things in there that just didn't conform with reality." Chodorow believes that Kobe Club merits two stars, "maybe a three"—but he recalled telling a friend, "Don't even dream of that ballpark, because it's me." (Chodorow was recently responsible for the restaurants Caviar & Banana and Rocco's, the demise of which was chronicled on reality television.)

Chodorow was writing in a time-honored tradition, the literary equivalent of sending black roses. At least since Zola's "J'Accuse," public figures have turned to the open letter for the promotion of pet causes and the airing of grievances. And so—in just the past year, in the *Times*—Yoko Ono pleads for healing on the anniversary of John Lennon's death, the Humane Society of the United States announces a boycott of Canadian seafood, a Kuwaiti contracting conglomerate protests President Bush's policy in Lebanon ("Who deserves to be accused of being a fascist!!!!"), and the Kazakh government sponsors a spread to encourage "Transforming the mixed blessings of a nuclear legacy." Chodorow composed his epistle en route to Italy. "I borrowed one of my people's computers," he said, "and I just basically wrote it stream-of-consciousness."

Bruni is not the first *Times* critic to be singled out by a subject with an exhibitionist streak. In 1990, after negative reviews of "Oh, Kay!," the producer David Merrick took out a page that featured a red heart filled with quotations from articles by Frank Rich and Alex Witchel, under the headline "At last, people are holding hands in the theater again!" (Rich and Witchel are married now, but at the time were not.) Several years later, an author placed a series of notices, under the name of a character from her novel, directed at the paper's lead book reviewer. "Yoo-hoo! My Cute Kakutani!" they read. "Leib Goldkorn is calling."



Frank Bruni and Jeffrey Chodorow

Craig Whitney, the *Times*' standards editor, said that the paper was glad to accept Chodorow's letter. "If advertisements are not defamatory or libellous, and they meet our standards of taste, we run them," he said. It took about five drafts, according to Chodorow, to come to a mutually acceptable version of the letter—"They beat me up a lot over it," he said, but explained that the *Times* conceded on most points after he threatened to publish the piece in the *Post.*

Bruni, reached on the telephone, fresh from a jog, said that he doesn't normally read criticism of his criticism

("It can be sort of ickily onanistic"), but he seemed to have given Chodorow's arguments earnest reflection. "I certainly do not consider it a badge of honor," he said. "I really don't feel like 'Ooh, wow.' I have the privilege of getting guaranteed space in the paper to say what I think. If someone wants to spend the money, then it's fair, I guess." He added that he took particular issue with only one point in the critique. "I totally understand that he's disappointed in the Kobe Club review, but I can assure you—I can assure *him*—that it's an utterly honest, if ultimately subjective, assessment." Bruni promised that he could review future Chodorow projects with "a completely open mind," but that may be moot. Chodorow said that his next restaurant will have a Pacific Northwest theme, and added that he was offering a trip to Seattle to any employee who blocks Bruni from its premises.

The chef David Chang's restaurant, Momofuku Ssäm Bar, happened to be under consideration on the day of the review-ad face-off. Over the phone, Chang said, "I felt like I was reading *The Onion*. If Chodorow was trying to be funny, it might have been one of the funniest letters ever written. But I'm sure he's dead serious, which made it not so funny." He went on, "There are so many 'I's in that letter—me, me, me. " Chang was thrilled that Ssäm Bar had garnered two stars, but admitted, "If Frank Bruni had poorly reviewed one of my restaurants, I might have pulled a Tonya Harding and broken his kneecaps. I'd have thought, Dude, I've gotta do something. But I'd never really do it."

—*Lauren Collins*

HIGHER EDUCATION
THE NEW BATHROOM WALL

Most of the comments uttered at Harvard after the appointment of its new president, Dr. Drew Gilpin Faust, are probably lost to history. One exception is a conversation held recently at 12:35 A.M.:

> Hail to the new president
> What's her name again . . .
>
> DR. FAUST
> Faust Haus . . .
> Harvard has made a Faustian bargain, it seems.

This exchange took place on boredatlamont.com (the name refers to the undergraduate library at Harvard), a Web site whose original version, strangely, began last year in Butler Library, at Columbia University. Its creator, Jonathan Pappas, was in Butler the other night, explaining the source of his inspiration. "Basically, I was sitting in that room"—he pointed to Room 209, an undergraduate study area—"and I was thinking, I want to create something to beat my boredom," he said. Using his laptop and the school's wireless connection, he bought the domain name boredatbutler.com, for nine dollars, and built a simple Web page consisting of a post box—where visitors can write public messages—and a note of introduction: "Post your thoughts . . . but keep it anonymous!"

That night, Pappas put up a few flyers. By morning, the site had accumulated more than two thousand messages. (One of the first: "I'm a big chubby boy looking for a big chubby zebra.") Pappas has since graduated and relocated to Silicon Valley, and he has expanded the "bored at" empire to include eleven schools.

From Brown (boredattherock):

> Annie Leibovitz is overrated. . . . Give me a camera, a beautiful well-known celebrity, and I'll give you a few good shots too. Gimme a break.
>
> Can someone help me find my virginity? I think I lost it in grad center last night
>
> FUCK, I left my coke outside the window to chill and it froze solid
>
> I am really tired
> I am really cold
> When's the housing lottery?

From Princeton (boredatfirestone):

> Party in Frist and Firestone all night WOO!!
>
> You guys are boring.
> Anyone else hungover?

In terms of volume, the Harvard board stands out. In five months, it has accumulated more than a hundred and seventy thousand posts—twice as many as the original version, at Columbia—for reasons that remain a mystery. "I wish I had an answer," Pappas said. "I can tell you that Christmas Day it had two thousand posts—isn't that strange?" But, he admitted, the Harvard site has a reputation for posts that involve sex, often in and around the library. "I actually feel like boredatlamont is more effective in getting people to hook up than parties at Harvard," one user wrote on a recent night at 2:39 A.M.

A few weeks ago, Andrew Fine, a Harvard sophomore, walked into a study area, and a post went up almost immediately: "Sigh I saw Andrew Fine today at Lamont. He was wearing a yellow shirt and blackish jeans. How can someone look so good in such ordinary clothes." Fine, who wrote a *Crimson* column criticizing the site ("Sad@Lamont" was the headline), said, "A friend e-mailed me and was, like, 'Someone's watching you in Lamont right now.' It's totally weird." Though Pappas says that writing about individuals is against the rules, he has a philosophical attitude toward the site's content: "If you give people the ability to say whatever they want, sometimes you'll get the most brilliant comments, things that you think belong in a book somewhere. It's an infinite spectrum between extreme ignorance and extreme brilliance."

At Harvard, however, not everyone agrees on the site's potential for profundity. Gordon Teskey, an English professor, wrote in an e-mail that he was interested in poetry but not, necessarily, in "typing by Harvard students." The poet Peter Richards grew nostalgic for a line he had once seen scrawled on a condom dispenser ("This gum tastes funny"). "It seems that ever since that ink/scratch-resistant paint for public bathrooms was invented, literary graffiti, or graffiti trying to be literary, has become a lost tradition," he wrote. "So I don't know, maybe this site, with all its cruising, gripes, pronouncements, and happy anonymous filth and such, is partly in response to that missing venue."

Presented with sample posts ("Classes suck," "Is Prince gay?"), Stephen Greenblatt, a professor who is the general editor of "The Norton Anthology of English Literature," was more optimistic. "There could well emerge, taken together, a certain accidental prose-poetry out of these brief notes," he wrote. "But Shakespeare it ain't. The short lines remind me of certain Dada-like moments in early Harold Pinter—or, better still, Charles Mee."

—*Lizzie Widdicombe*

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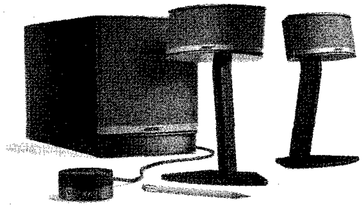

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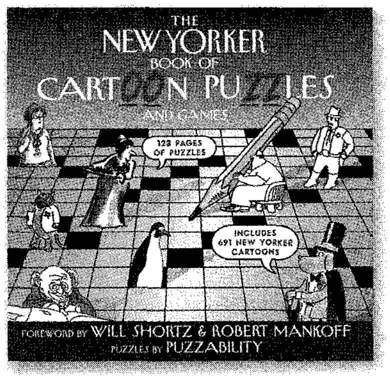
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PERSONAL HISTORY

STAGE MOTHERHOOD

My son, the star.

BY DEBORAH COPAKEN KOGAN

On the morning of his première at the Sundance Film Festival, in January, my son was escorted from a Park City TV station, where he'd just been interviewed, into a white S.U.V. waiting to drive him to a photo shoot for *People*. "This is Jacob Kogan," one of the film's publicists said to the driver. "He's the star of 'Joshua.'" Gesturing toward me, she added, "And this is his mother? Manager?"

"I'm his mother," I said. "He doesn't have a manager." My son is eleven; "Joshua" is his first film. The only managing he normally requires I have covered: pediatrician appointments, the occasional hot meal, a new pair of sneakers every six to nine months.

The publicist rolled her eyes and slammed her door shut. "Whatever."

Our car made its way down Main Street, through the crowds of filmmakers, dealmakers, and cinéastes, everyone dressed identically in denim and goose down. Jacob squeezed my hand for support, as if he were the parent protecting the child. He'd noticed how people reacted when I introduced myself as his mother, the way that they seemed, sometimes, to look through me. "My mom writes books," he told the publicist.

"Mm-hmm," she replied.

"Don't worry about it," I whispered to him. "It doesn't bother me."

A few months before "Joshua" started shooting, a film-director friend of mine tried to warn me: "You do understand that every single person on that set will hate you?" What could I say? I've read the tabloid tales of Macaulay Culkin and Lindsay Lohan; I've seen "Gypsy." In the opening scene of the movie, a gaggle of stage mothers pounce on Karl Malden, demanding pink spotlights and special treatment for their cherubs. "Mothers, would you please get out! Get off the stage!" the theatre owner bellows. Then Rosalind Russell blasts through the doors, a bulldozer in leopard print, shouting, "Sing out, Louise! Sing out!"

When people ask how Jacob got into acting, I take great pains to keep myself on the fringes of the narrative, which goes something like this: At the age of four, Jacob was asked by a casting agent, the mother of a child in his play group, to audition for a film by Lasse Hallström. Jacob made it to the final round of callbacks, but then the film lost its financing. I was mostly relieved, but my son was hooked. For the next three years, he begged to be allowed to audition for another film. I consulted my friend Fran, a child psychologist, who pointed out that if Jacob were demanding soccer lessons with such unrelenting fervor I would probably let him play. "It's not about you anymore," she said. "Seven is the age of reason. He knows what he wants."

I signed him up for musical-theatre classes at the Y. I clapped loudly when he performed in his school play. But I drew the line at professional acting. He was too young, I told him. Then one day my husband, Paul, received a videotape in the mail. It was a copy of the 1971 Russian film "Telegramma," directed by Rolan Bykov, and starring Paul and his twin brother, George. Bykov was a friend of Paul's mother, Raya, who was raising the boys in Moscow on her own. When Raya lost her job and became a refusenik after applying for asylum under Brezhnev, Bykov cast the boys in his film. (They shared a role.) I had never seen it; neither had Jacob.

"Look," Paul said, pointing to the five-year-old boy peering out from the screen. "That's me! Or maybe it's George, I'm not sure."

Jacob stood in front of the television, transfixed. He couldn't understand a word of the dialogue, but he followed that little boy and his story all the way through to the Cyrillic credits. Then he turned around and stared at me, hard.

"That was different," I said. "Daddy had to act if he wanted to eat."

"Let him audition," my husband said. "What's the big deal?"

I finally relented. I sent three snapshots of Jacob—which he'd picked out himself—to an agent, along with a passive-aggressive letter explaining that while my son wanted to be an actor, I thought it was a really bad idea, but if she wanted to try to convince me otherwise we would be happy to meet with her.

Six months later, Jacob and I flew to Los Angeles for his first callback, for a sitcom pilot. We sat in a crammed waiting room on the Paramount lot with three other boys, all of whom looked remarkably like Jacob: same neatly cut light-brown hair, same pale skin and soft features. All of the boys were accompanied by their mothers, and one had a manager in tow. When the manager found out that Jacob and I lived in New York, he tried to impress us. "My good friend Ally Sheedy lives in New York," he said. "You know her?"

The four boys eyed one another warily, then made their way into the center of the room to swap Gameboys. Three hours later, we were all still there, awaiting a decision, when the boys' stomachs began to grumble. The manager stepped out for provisions and returned with two bags of groceries, which he proceeded to offer only to his client.

"Those chips look good," Jacob said.

"They are," the manager replied, ignoring the hint. I figured this was his way of showing the less experienced stage mothers how much better off we'd be with him in our corner, like that sign near the Holland Tunnel that reads, "If you lived here, you'd be home by now."

Finally, two of the boys, including Jacob, were told that they'd be moving on to the Fox lot later that day for yet another round of callbacks. The other two would not. One of the boys who was eliminated was staying at the same hotel as Jacob and me, so I offered to drive him and his mother back there in the interim. He bawled in the back seat the entire ride. His mother sat in the passenger seat, lobbing tiny grenades of comfort and wisdom over her headrest. "It's because you don't have blue eyes," she said curtly.

"But I wanted to get my handprints at Grauman's Chinese Theatre!" the boy wailed.

His mother remained silent.

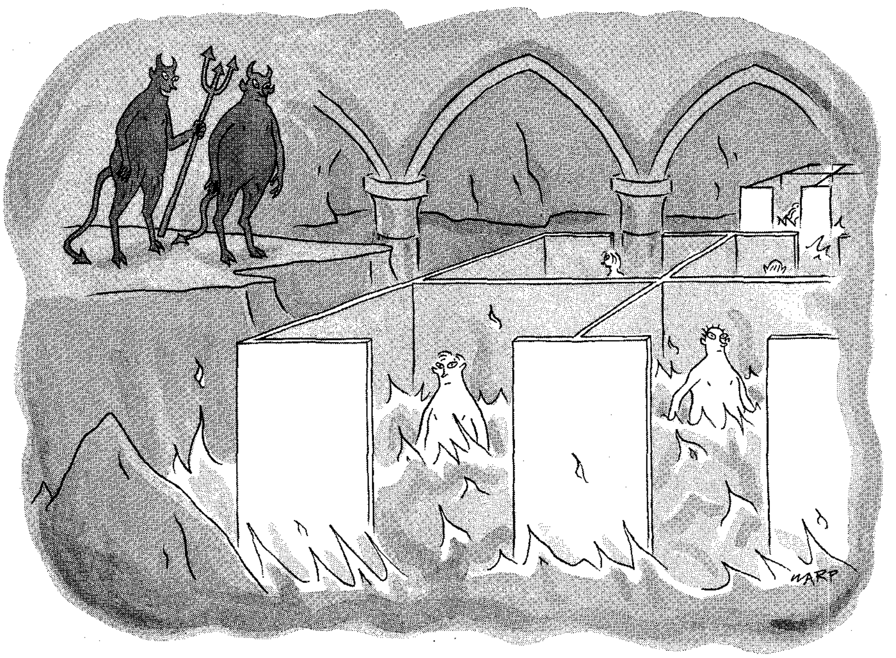
"Oh, sweetie," I said, making contact with his unfortunate hazel eyes in the rearview mirror, "you have plenty of time to get your handprints in the cement in front of Grauman's Chinese. You're only eight! You have your whole career ahead of you."

"No!" he shouted. "Not in the cement. I wanted to get the handprints they sell at the gift shop!" He stared angrily at the back of his mother's head and began to cry harder.

His mother turned to me. "As if I'd spend forty dollars on a set of handprints if he doesn't book the part," she said.

I came home from that trip to L.A.

Jacob Kogan with Vera Farmiga on the set of "Joshua," in which he plays the title character. Photograph by Sylvia Plachy.



"We're always looking for new ways to increase the suffering."

resolved that Jacob could pursue his passion for acting only with four essential caveats: (1) no sitcoms, (2) no commercials, (3) no dumb films, and (4) no anything else that would ever have him relocating to Los Angeles. This left only independent features and New York-based shows like MTV2's "Wonder Showzen"—a darkly funny sketch-comedy on which Jacob happily landed various recurring roles in the fall of 2004.

In early 2006, when Jacob was ten, the director George Ratliff began casting for "Joshua," a psychological thriller that he wrote with his friend David Gilbert. The film is about a wealthy Manhattan couple, the Cairns, whose lives take a dark turn when they bring home a new sibling for their odd—and oddly cold—piano prodigy of a son, Joshua. Ratliff had already cast Vera Farmiga and Sam Rockwell as Joshua's parents, but he didn't have anyone for the title role. So he asked his friend John Lee, one of the creators of "Wonder Showzen," for a short list of names.

When I got the call telling me that Jacob had booked the part, I was walking home from my writing studio, standing by a trash can on the corner of Chambers Street and West Broadway. I remember the trash can because I was newly pregnant and suffering from morning sickness, and I was glad to have it nearby. But it was the news of Jacob's new role that had my stomach churning. As excited as I was for him, I was mortified by what it would mean for me.

Every mother has to grapple with duelling identities—I am Me; I am Someone's Mother—but being a stage mother makes this conflict so *explicit*. When I left college, I spent a decade covering hard news, first as a war photographer and then as a television producer. After that, I turned to writing, publishing a book about those early experiences. Then I hit a five-year-long dry patch, during which I abandoned some six hundred pages of three partial novels. I finished the fourth just before my fortieth birthday. When it finally sold, after thirty-nine rejections, it was for the exact amount that Jacob would be paid for twenty-five days of shooting "Joshua."

For the majority of stage mothers, the daily shuttling into the city from New Jersey or Long Island or Connecticut, or even from as far away as southern Pennsylvania, becomes the full-time career they left behind. And, as with any co-workers who've spent enough time together, clawing for scraps, strong bonds begin to form.

While their progeny are busy checking out the sign-up sheets at the entrance ("Ooh, she's the one who booked that Chuck E. Cheese's commercial last week!"), the mothers gather on stiff chairs and badly upholstered couches to trade information: Did you sign him up for tap lessons yet? He'll get nowhere without them. Oh, look who's here! Mr. C.S.I. himself. I heard he booked that film with what's-her-name, from Nickelodeon. No, we're not driving back until six. I know the Lincoln Tunnel will be a nightmare at that hour, but Chloe's got an audition for "Law & Order" at five. Don't use that guy—a thousand dollars he charges, and our head shots all came out blurry.

Some days, I can hide behind the screen of my laptop and tune it out. But most of the time I sit on those plastic chairs, my ears naked to the air, fielding questions from the other mothers—Who's his agent? Does he have a manager? Where would I have seen him?—and counting the days until Jacob is old enough to travel on the subway by himself. And yet I know that when that day comes I'll miss certain aspects of the adventure—travelling back and forth to auditions, sneaking in a hot chocolate when we can, running lines at the kitchen table in our pajamas, trying to puzzle out a character's motivations, and therefore, unwittingly, our own.

The production company faxed us a copy of the five-week shooting schedule for "Joshua," and of course the baby was due in the middle of it. I called my father, who'd just retired, and asked him to be on standby as Jacob's on-set guardian. I figured that I could handle the other responsibilities: taking Jacob to his daily rehearsals and to the intensive piano lessons required by the director, making appointments for his haircut, costume fittings, and the mandatory doctor's exam.

But my body had other ideas. My contractions began at thirty-one weeks, at which point I was hospitalized for several days, pumped full of terbutaline and various steroids for the baby's lungs, and told, in no uncertain terms, that I was to stay in bed, where the painful contractions continued, unabated, until baby Leo was born, five and a half weeks later.

A few hours after Leo took his first breaths, I was applying pressure to a small mass on my forehead that had started bleeding during delivery—which a resident had assured me was not a stigmata but something called a pyogenic granuloma, unless it was melanoma, but not to worry—when one of the producers of "Joshua" called my cell phone. "We need an infant to play the role of Lily," he said. Lily is the new baby who wreaks havoc on the Cairn family, and the producer and I had joked—*joked!*—when he hired Jacob that if my baby was born early he'd get a twofer.

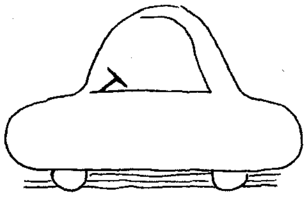
"But I'm still in the hospital."

"I know," he said. But the youngest infants he could find were all three months old.

Of course they were, I thought. What kind of a crazy mother would hand a newborn over to a film crew? "I'm sorry," I told him. "I just can't do it." At three days postpartum, I reminded him, my milk would just be coming in, an unpleasant day under the best of circumstances. When my husband visited the set the next day and called to try to persuade me, I was even more adamant. "You don't seem to understand," I said. "I've been contracting every five minutes for nearly six weeks straight, I can't sit because of my stitches, and my forehead thinks we're the Messiah."

He handed the phone to Jacob, who was taking a break from shooting a scene where he tries to push his new baby sister down the steps of the Brooklyn Museum. "Please?" my son said. "It would mean a lot to me."

Please? It would mean a lot to me? I felt as if I were on the soundstage of one of those sitcoms which I'd barred Jacob from auditioning for. The only thing missing was the laugh track. And so, the next day, I left the real hospital with my swaddled son and took him straight down to the fake hospital where he would play a girl in a fake scene that my older son had just lived in real life—meeting his new baby sibling. (Insert laugh track here.) When we walked onto the set, the prop master asked if I would mind putting a clip on my premature baby's umbilical stump, to make him look more authentically newborn. Since his real clip had just been removed at the real hospital that morning, I couldn't see why he shouldn't wear a fake clip at the fake hospital.



When the scene was over, I tried to remove the clip from the end of the baby's stump, but I couldn't. At that point, the whole cast and crew had moved on to a different set, so there I sat, all alone, in increasingly severe postpartum pain, bleeding from the forehead, lactating all over my blouse, and pulling and tugging at a plastic clip that wouldn't budge off my poor newborn's now oozing umbilicus. Luckily, the fake-hospital set was on an abandoned floor of a real hospital, so I found my way to the real neonatal intensive-care unit and banged on the door. "Can you please get this off?" I asked the nurse who answered the door, pointing to my son's clamped stump.

She looked completely confused. "Are you a patient here?" she asked.

"No, Ma'am," I said. "I'm . . ." I couldn't even say it: I'm a stage mother, and we're on the set of a film, and I just got out of a different hospital this morning, and this is my newborn son, who's playing the role of my elder child's baby sister in the fake hospital that's part of your real one.

"It'll take too long to explain," I said. "Can you do it?"

"Of course," she said. Umbilical-cord clips are just like security tags in clothing stores, she told me; removing them requires special equipment. She would just have to locate a pair of clippers and then we could be on our way.

But we couldn't leave, not yet, because Leo was needed for one more scene, this one with Vera and Sam cooing over him as Jacob looks on unhappily from afar. Several hours later, when the scene still hadn't been shot, I handed my three-day-old son to a production assistant, told her to make sure everyone who came into contact with him used Purell, and found an empty hospital bed, onto which I collapsed. The next time I opened my eyes, Sam Rockwell

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He: (*not turning*) You going?

She: (*sharply*) You don't think I should?

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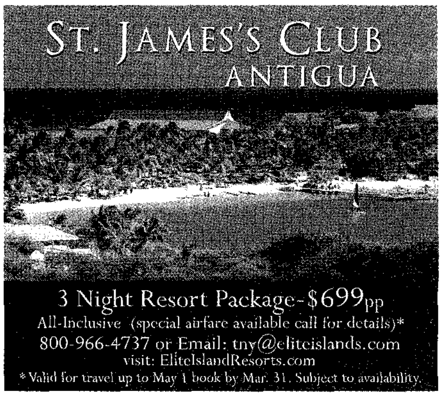

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was standing in the room, staring down at baby Leo asleep in his stroller, and whispering to Jacob.

"Your mom's a real trouper for coming out here today," he said.

"I know," Jacob said. And I could tell that he meant it.

Rockwell showed up at the end of the *People* shoot in Park City. "How do you like Sundance?" he asked.

Jacob shrugged. "I haven't really seen anything yet," he said. We'd arrived by taxi from the airport at midnight the night before and had been picked up at our condo at 7 A.M. for the morning's publicity blitz.

Finally, at 11:30 A.M., we were finished. And then we were dumped, unceremoniously, in the middle of Main Street. "You can find your way back to Deer Valley by yourselves, can't you?" the publicist asked. She needed the car to take Sam and Vera to another interview.

"But I don't know where our condo is," I said. We'd also left both Jacob's homework and our hats in the back seat, and it was starting to snow.

"Just take the shuttle," the publicist yelled over her shoulder. And then she was gone.

"I'm cold," Jacob said. "And she has my 'Ender's Game.' "

"Don't worry," I said. "I'll get us back. And I'll get your book back, too." I had once commandeered a donkey to get myself out of the Hindu Kush; how hard could it be to get from Park City to Deer Valley? Just then, a taxi full of people passed by, with a telephone number painted across it: 1-800-649-TAXI. I pulled out my cell phone and dialled. "Sorry, we're out of taxis," the dispatcher said, and hung up.

"Can we go skiing now?" Jacob asked. As natural as my son is at acting, he's the exact opposite on a pair of skis, and I'd promised to try to get him up on the mountain for a lesson.

I looked at my watch. If we made it back to the condo in the next half hour, we would have time for lunch and one run down the slopes before we had to be back in Park City for the evening's festivities. I decided that skiing would be the perfect antidote to his passive ride through the Hollywood glitz machine that morning. "Excuse me!" I shouted, flagging down an empty yellow school bus. "Can you take us to Deer Valley?"

"Hop on," the driver said, laughing at our plight. He took us to Deer Valley, helped us find our condo, and wouldn't let us pay. We walked a mile up to the slopes, rented skis and boots, bought new hats to replace the ones held hostage with Jacob's homework, and snowplowed our way down a bunny trail called Success.

Back at the condo, we met up with Celia Weston, who plays Jacob's grandmother in the film. She wanted to buy Sundance T-shirts for her godchildren, and Jacob wanted to buy a sweatshirt and a deck of cards, so the three of us headed to the souvenir shop before the pre-première party. It would have taken us all of five minutes to do our shopping, but Celia kept getting stopped by well-wishers on the street. "Maybe I should be a musician instead of an actor," Jacob said. His father and I had recently taken him to a concert to see The Who and the Red Hot Chili Peppers. "They can walk down the street and no one bothers them."

"That's not true," I said. "Look at John Lennon."

"I bet Flea can walk down the street without anyone bothering him."

"Who's he?"

"See?"

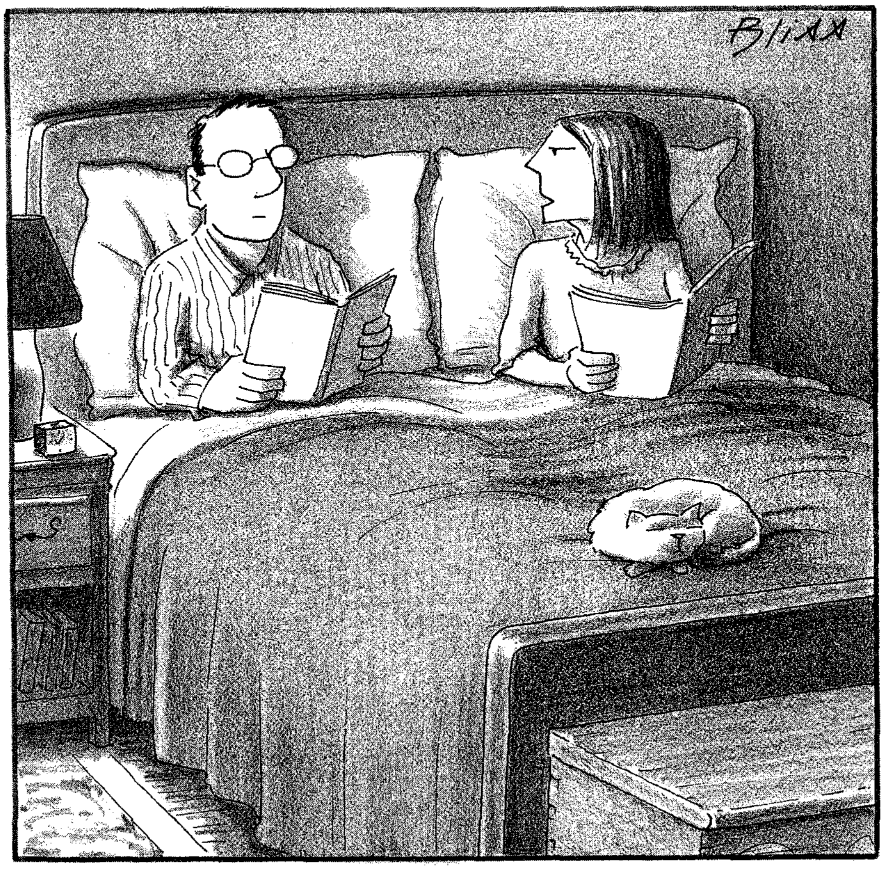
I furrowed my brow, perplexed at his change of heart but understanding it as well. Children have passions that they seize and drop all the time. When Jacob was three, he spent every single day doing jigsaw puzzles. Then one day he simply stopped.

When we finally arrived at the cocktail party, not only did Jacob not have to worry about anyone recognizing him but the bouncer at the door wouldn't let him in. "Utah law," he said. "No kids near alcohol."

"But he's the star of the film," one of the film's producers said, standing on the other side of a velvet rope.

"Too bad," the bouncer said. "We'll get shut down."

We finally persuaded the bouncer to let us sneak Jacob into the V.I.P. room, where we cordoned him off from the alcohol. When we left the party, the paparazzi were outside, and greeted Jacob



"Could you stop making that breathing sound?"

with flashing bulbs. We were told to wait for Dave Matthews (who wrote a song for the film) to show up, because the people from the *Wall Street Journal* Weekend Edition, who were hosting the party, needed a photograph of Jacob and Dave standing together against a backdrop that read, "THE WALL STREET JOURNAL WEEKEND EDITION." Dave Matthews was mobbed by fans, and Jacob saw this and realized that, whether you're a musician or an actor or an Olympic skier or a dancing goat, a certain degree of celebrity might come with the territory.

When the lights in the theatre dimmed and I saw my son's face projected on the screen, I sat between Jacob and my friend Julie, holding their hands and crying. Not only because it finally struck me that my child was, in fact, an actor but because, in the eight months that had passed since the first frame was shot, Jacob had already changed. The boy on that screen was no longer him but a version of him, frozen in time.

"How did each of you get involved in doing the film?" a woman in the audience asked during the Q. & A. afterward. Sam Rockwell spoke of wanting to play the straight man for once; Vera Farmiga discussed the research she'd done into postpartum depression; Benoît Debie, the film's cinematographer, talked about making light and shadow a character in the film. Then it was Jacob's turn. "Um, my agent gave me the script," he said with a shrug, and the audience burst out laughing.

After the screening, everyone met for another party, where Jacob promptly fell asleep on Vera Farmiga's lap. I woke him only when I saw Philip Seymour Hoffman enter the room, because Jacob was miffed that he'd missed meeting the actor before the screening. We walked over to where Hoffman stood, chatting with Sam Rockwell. Jacob held out his hand as if he'd been working the room for decades, and told the actor how much he loved his work, a compliment that was graciously returned. "I only got to see part of 'Magnolia,' though," Jacob said. "My mom turned it off when it became inappropriate."

Hoffman laughed and turned toward me. "Is this your mother?" he said, looking me straight in the eye.

"Yeah, I'm the mother," I said, my defenses high after a day's worth of condescension. I was also preoccupied with the milk building up in my breasts, which I desperately needed to pump. For whatever reason, this kept happening whenever Sam Rockwell was around.

"That must have been some path you had to pull him down," Hoffman said, and something about the word "pull" made me snap.

"I didn't *pull* him," I said. "I never wanted him to be an actor!"

He looked at me as if I were insane. "No, I meant—that was a difficult role he had to play, and it must have been hard for you, as a parent, to help him get to that place of coldness." Here he was, the first stranger of the day to treat a stage mother with respect and empathy, and I had to go and bite his head off.

"Oh," I said. Then I mumbled an awkward apology.

In the last scene of "Gypsy," Rosalind Russell is dancing on an empty stage, in an empty theatre, acting out her vaudeville-star fantasy, when Natalie Wood appears from the wings, clapping. "You'd really have been something, Mother," she says, "if you had someone to push you, like I did." Then, in a final act of grace and humility, she invites her embarrassment of a mother to accompany her to the party after the show. I remembered that scene as Philip Seymour Hoffman and Sam Rockwell walked toward the bar and I stood there with my son at his own after-party. I thought about how I might have responded to the conversational door that Hoffman had opened.

Yes, Mr. Hoffman, I should have said, that was some path I had to pull him down, but once he was there he was there all alone. That was his performance tonight. And I'm proud of him. ♦

CONSTABULARY NOTES FROM ALL OVER

From the St. Peter (Minn.) Herald.

A resident on 1400 block of Thomas St. reported unknown person(s) had entered their backyard and made an obscene snow sculpture in the fresh snow. Footprints show someone had entered and exited the garage but nothing appeared to be missing. The object was made in the middle of the backyard and it appears as if two people got out of a car, walked up the driveway and into the backyard. None of the neighbors saw anything.

FICTION

"As the leather seat squeaked under his shifting weight, Jonathan thought of the brash confidence with which he had signed up for the Yale Summer Session Courses in Writing program. Now he was accepted, but should he be here? His eyes darted to the bent head of his teacher..."

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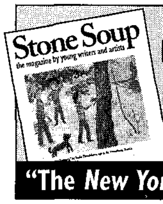

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TURKISH JOURNAL

THE VIEW

And the dog in the road.

BY ORHAN PAMUK

THE VIEW

It was a hot day. My five-year-old daughter, Rüya, and I were out on the island of Büyükada, going for a ride in a horse-drawn carriage. I sat facing backward and my daughter sat facing me. She was looking at the road ahead. We went past gardens full of trees and flowers, past low walls, wooden houses, and vegetable patches. As the carriage lurched this way and that, I watched my daughter's face, seeking in her expressions some sense of what she saw in the world around her.

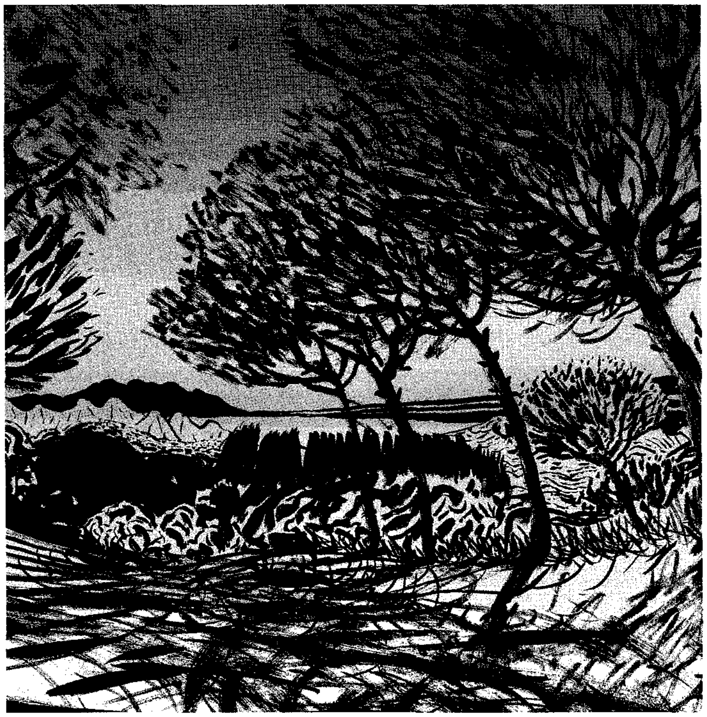
Things, objects, trees, and walls; posters, notices, streets, and cats. Asphalt. Hot. Had it ever been this hot?

Then we started up the hill; the horses were straining, and the driver cracked his whip. The carriage slowed down. I looked at a house. As the world flowed past us, it was as if my daughter and I were looking at exactly the same things. We looked at them one by one: a leaf, a trash can, a ball, a horse, a child, a house, a bicycle. But also the greenness of the leaf, the redness of the trash can, the way the ball bounced, the horse's expression, the child's face. Then each of these things slipped away; we weren't really looking at them, anyway—our eyes kept moving. We weren't really looking at any part of this hot, afternoon world. It was slipping past us in the heat, a flimsy world that seemed to evaporate before our eyes. It was almost as if we were drifting off ourselves! We see things and we don't. The world is bathed in the color of heat, and, in our minds, we can see this, too.

We passed a forest, but even there it wasn't cool. The trees seemed to be radiating heat. When the road grew steeper, the horses slowed even more. We listened to the cicadas. Then, just as the road seemed about to disappear into the trees, we saw the view.

"Br-r-rs," the driver said, to stop the horses. "Let them rest," he said.

We were at the edge of a cliff. Beneath us were rocks, the sea, and, rising out of the mist, the other islands. What a beautiful blue the sea was, with the sun sparkling on its surface: everything was where it should be, gleaming and immaculate. Before us was a perfectly formed world. Rüya and I admired it in silence.



LORENZO MATTOTTI

The driver lit a cigarette; we could smell the smoke.

Why was it so beautiful, this view of the world? Perhaps because we could see it all. Perhaps because if we fell off the edge we would die. Perhaps because nothing looks bad from a distance. Perhaps because we'd never seen it from this height. So what were we doing here? In this world?

"Is it beautiful?" I asked Rüya. "What makes it beautiful?"

"If we fell off the edge, would we die?"

"Yes, we'd die."

For a moment, she gazed fearfully at the cliff. Then she got bored. The cliff, the sea, the rocks: they didn't change, didn't move. Boring. A dog appeared! "A dog," we both said. It was wagging its tail, and moving. We both turned to admire it, and neither of us looked at the view again.

WHAT I KNOW ABOUT DOGS

He was a mud-colored dog, nothing out of the ordinary. He was wagging his tail. His eyes were sad. He didn't sniff us, the way curious dogs do. He used his mournful eyes to try to get to know us. When he had done so, he stuck his wet nose into the carriage.

Silence. Rüya was scared. She pulled back her legs and looked at me.

"Don't be afraid," I whispered. I shifted from my seat to Rüya's.

The dog drew back, too. Together, we examined him carefully. A four-legged creature. What was it like to be a dog? I closed my eyes. As I began to think about what it was like to be a dog, I tried to recall all the things that I knew about dogs:

1. Recently, an engineer friend of mine had told me how he'd sold a Sivas Kangal to some Americans. The dog pictured in the brochure he showed me was a strong, handsome, upright Kangal, and the caption said, "Hello, I'm a Turkish Kangal. My average height is this many centimetres. I'm this number of years old. I'm this intelligent, and this is my breeding. A while back, a friend of ours went missing, but we followed his scent for six hundred kilometres until we found him. So that's how clever and loyal we are," etc.

2. Dogs in Turkish illustrated novels, and dogs who have been translated into Turkish, say "Hav." But dogs in foreign illustrated novels say "Woof."

And that was all I could remember

about dogs. I tried, but nothing else came to mind. Except, of course, the fact that dogs had pointed teeth and growled . . .

"Daddy, what are you doing?" Rüya asked. "Don't close your eyes like that. I'm bored."

I opened my eyes. "Driver," I said. "Where is this dog from?"

"Where's the dog?" he asked, and I showed him.

"These dogs come to the dump up ahead," the driver said.

The dog looked straight in front of him, as if he knew we were talking about him.

"In the winter, they go hungry. They suffer, they tear each other apart."

For a long time, no one spoke.

"Daddy, I'm bored," Rüya said.

"Driver, let's get going," I said.

When the carriage began to move, Rüya turned her attention back to the trees, the sea, and the road, and forgot me, too. That was when I closed my eyes again and tried one more time to remember what I knew about dogs:

3. Once there was a dog I loved. Then he was poisoned and he died. If a long time had passed since he'd last seen me, this dog would be so happy that, when he wriggled on his back waiting for me to pet him, he'd wet himself.

4. It's easy to draw a dog.

5. In the neighborhood where a friend of mine lived, there was a dog that barked furiously at any poor person passing through but let the rich pass in silence.

6. The sound of a dog dragging a broken chain along the ground scares me. It must remind me of something traumatic.

7. That dog back there didn't follow us.

I opened my eyes and decided that people actually remember very little. I must have seen tens of thousands of dogs in this world, and when I was looking at them they struck me as beautiful. The world surprises us in the same way. It is here, there, right next to us. Then it fades, and everything turns to nothing.

8. Two years after I wrote this piece, I was attacked by a pack of dogs in Maçka Park. They bit me. I had to have five injections at the Rabies Hospital in Sultanahmet. ◆

(*Translated, from the Turkish, by Maureen Freely.*)

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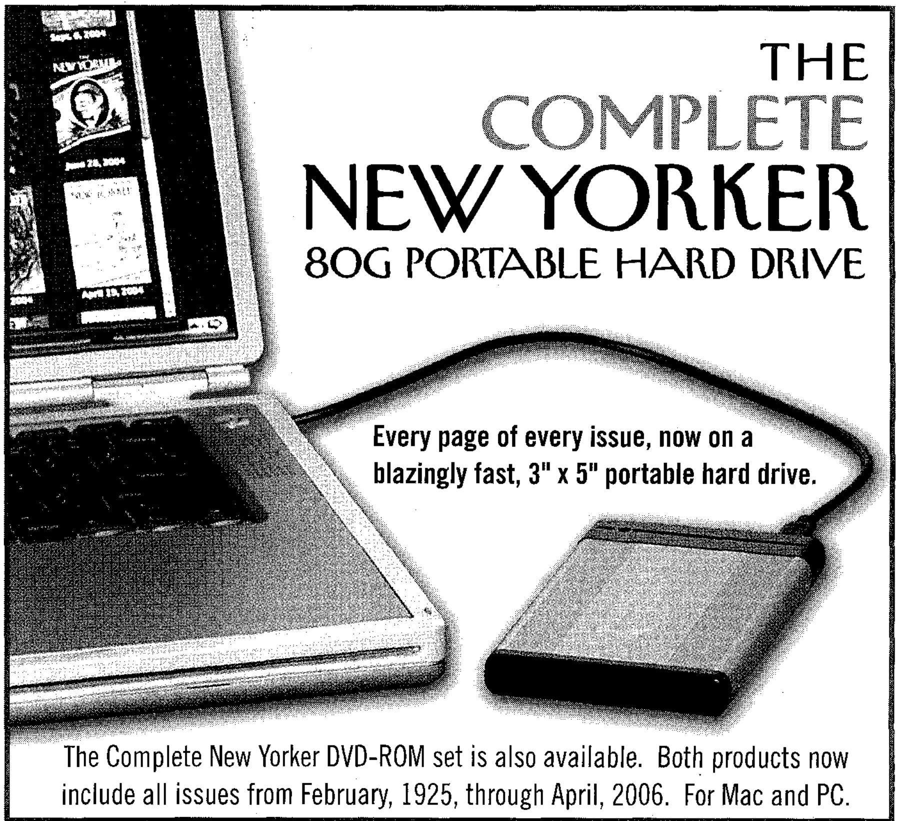

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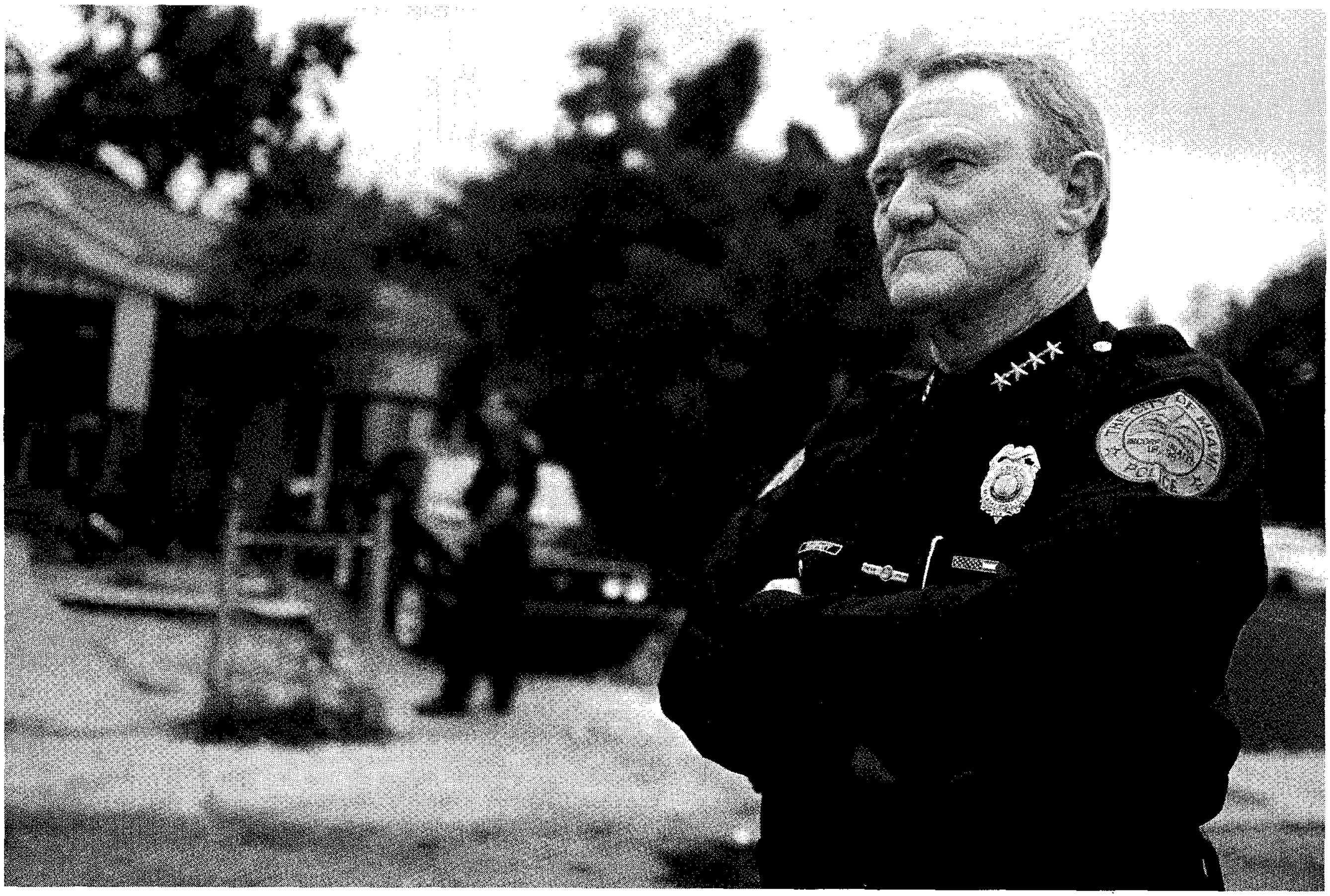
DEPT. OF LAW ENFORCEMENT

MIAMI BLUE

The testing of a top cop.

BY ELSA WALSH

On a sunny morning last fall, John Timoney, the Miami chief of police, changed into navy-blue shorts and a short-sleeved shirt with "POLICE" stencilled on the back and wheeled his mountain bike out into the parking lot of the department's headquarters, where about two dozen of his top officers were waiting. For more than four hours, Timoney led them on a twenty-four-mile tour of Miami, looping through the predominantly African-American neighborhood of Overtown, then north to the Korean-dominated Fashion District, and through the Design District and Little Haiti. After a break for lunch, Timoney picked up the pace and led the group south along Biscayne Boulevard, across the Flagler Street Bridge, and into Little Havana. There was a triumphal feel to the ride, which Timoney leads at least twice a month.



Police Chief John Timoney is a respected reformer, but his work has been a burden to his family.

JOE RAEDIE/GETTY IMAGES

Timoney, who is fifty-eight, has short reddish-gray hair and the ruddy face of an Irish boxer. He is just under six feet tall. When he walks, he bounces on his toes with his chest puffed out, "like James Cagney in 'Yankee Doodle Dandy,' " as William Bratton, the former New York City police commissioner, noted in his 1998 memoir, "Turnaround." Timoney is widely regarded today as one of the most progressive and effective police chiefs in the country—a reformer and an iconoclast. In New York, where he served under Bratton, Timoney talked about replacing steel handcuffs with Velcro straps—pink if possible. In Philadelphia, where he was police commissioner for four years, he had his force trade in their blackjacks for pepper spray, and he gave women's groups the right to review sex-crime cases. Timoney speaks in what a friend calls a Bronx brogue, an accent that evolved from a childhood spent in Dublin and Washington Heights. (When Timoney was twelve, the family moved from Ireland to New York to join his father, who had found work as a doorman on Fifth Avenue.) He can be abrupt and defensive when dealing with critics—reporters have found him to be exceptionally thin-skinned—and he has got into trouble for his occasional outbursts, perhaps most memorably during a blowup at Rudolph Giuliani when he was mayor of New York. "I've always sold big. Very controversial. Big mouth. Loudmouth," he says, as if he didn't much care.

When Timoney took the top police job in Miami, in January, 2003, he inherited a department that had major problems, not the least of which was an alarming record for shooting civilians.

The Miami *Herald*, in a series in November, 2002, called that record "an escalating pattern of reckless shooting"; Raul Martinez, the chief of police, resigned in 2002, and the mayor, Manny Diaz, asked the Department of Justice to investigate. On the day that Timoney was sworn in, eleven Miami cops went on trial in federal court on charges of conspiring to plant guns on unarmed suspects in order to cover up police shootings.

In the decade before Timoney's appointment, Miami police had killed twenty-eight people and fired at another hundred and twenty-four. During his first twenty months on the job, no Miami cop fired a shot, a phenomenon that appears to be unique in a city of Miami's size. In the four years of his tenure, police have shot at seven people, killing two and wounding four. The murder rate in Miami has dropped from about twenty to fourteen per hundred thousand in the years since 2003. (Although major crime over all dropped in 2006, there was an increase in the number of killings in Miami.) Credit for the drop certainly does not belong solely to Timoney; there has been a nationwide renaissance in police work and in attitudes toward policing, and crime in many American cities, including Miami, fell steadily during the nineteen-nineties. In New York, where much of this change was pioneered, Timoney held several top jobs with the N.Y.P.D.

Timoney joined the N.Y.P.D. in 1967, at the age of nineteen. He quickly made his name at the Forty-fourth Precinct, on Sedgwick Avenue in the Bronx, where he had a top record for arrests. He also earned a B.A. in American history from John Jay College and went on to get master's degrees in both American history and urban planning. In the early eighties, he was placed in charge of reviewing firearm use and became deeply interested in reforms, announced in 1972, that restricted how and when police could use their weapons. What he discovered was that, in the year before the restrictions were imposed, New York police fired their weapons about eight hundred times, and some ninety people were killed; dozens more were wounded. About a dozen officers were killed.

The pattern changed dramatically after August, 1972, when the prohibition was announced: according to Timoney, shootings in the last third of that year dropped by fifty per cent. "Without anything. Just issuing a policy," he said. "No training. No big announcements at roll calls. You get down to 1985, when only twelve people are killed by the N.Y.P.D. Down from ninety to twelve." No policemen were killed in 1985. Over the years, Timoney continued to refine what he had learned, but the most important lesson to him was that seemingly intractable problems could be solved.

Gordon Wasserman, Timoney's former chief of staff in Philadelphia, who had been an Oxford don and who worked in the United Kingdom overseeing police science and technology, told me that the first time he met Timoney they sat in the Old Stand bar, on Third Avenue, and discussed Joyce, Yeats, and Orwell's "Shooting an Elephant." (Timoney was fascinated by how quickly the Burmese natives submitted to the occupying British forces.)

Timoney has been a literary character—of a sort: in "Sore Loser," a genre novel written by a friend, the late Mike McAlary, a *News* columnist. The first time I met Timoney, he mentioned the book, which tells the story of a detective's pursuit of a serial killer who targets sports officials. "All that was in there were Timoney stories, kind of strung together, stuff he and I would just talk about," he said. Much of the book, he added, almost incidentally, was "about my daughter and the drug habit." Behind his desk were photographs of his two children. Christine, who is now twenty-eight, was addicted to heroin for about seven years. In 2005, Sean, who is twenty-six, was arrested by federal agents and later pleaded guilty to conspiring to buy and distribute marijuana.

Over several conversations with Timoney, whenever I asked about his children's problems he would hesitate—he didn't want to get into it, he would say. I noted that others had remarked on the obvious irony: his success in law enforcement and his problems as a father. "Family is completely different, just completely different," Timoney said. "I actually don't know what the answer is. But with the kids it was always this"—he pushed his fists together to suggest years of worry and clashes with his children.

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"It's a life of conflict that somehow comes out for the public good," his friend Michael Julian, the former chief of personnel for the N.Y.P.D., told me. One evening, I read a few lines from McAlary's novel aloud to Timoney. " 'The girl was him,' " I read. Timoney laughed and said, "Yeah, exactly." When I added that she " 'was the stiletto in her father's heart,' " he let out a small sigh.

Christine's drug problems were developing at about the time that her father's career was taking off. By 1993, at the end of David Dinkins's term as mayor, Timoney held the rank of deputy chief and headed the Office of Management, Analysis and Planning, which acted as a think tank for Raymond Kelly, the commissioner at the time. (Kelly, who returned to the commissioner's job after Michael Bloomberg took office as mayor, in 2002, told me that he regarded Timoney as "a smart, aggressive young man with a good story.") Timoney's days were long, and his hours were irregular, although he had found time to coach sports teams for Sean and Christine. His wife, Noreen, whom he married in 1971, had been a director of finance and administration with ABC, but as her husband's responsibilities grew she quit that job and worked from home as a management consultant. "I handled certain things so he would not have to deal with it and not have to feel that in any way it would register with him professionally," she told me. "But the kids considered his not being around so much an abandonment, more than just 'He's busy.' He just became busier."

In January, 1994, shortly after going to work for Giuliani, Bratton named Timoney his chief of department, responsible for day-to-day operations; a year later, he promoted him to first deputy commissioner—second-in-command. Bratton had promised Giuliani to reduce city crime by forty per cent in three years, and, as it turned out, the police brought the city's murder rate down to numbers that had not been seen in thirty years. Prevention was central to this strategy. The most publicized approach was a focus on so-called quality-of-life issues: public drunkenness, panhandling, prostitution, graffiti. That in turn became a way to deal with more serious crimes—by enforcing warrants and by being on duty at the right time. Crime statistics were gathered from every precinct and evaluated brutally in front of peers. The late Jack Maple, the former transit cop who came up with CompStat, as the idea was dubbed, called it a "live audit of over-all police performance."

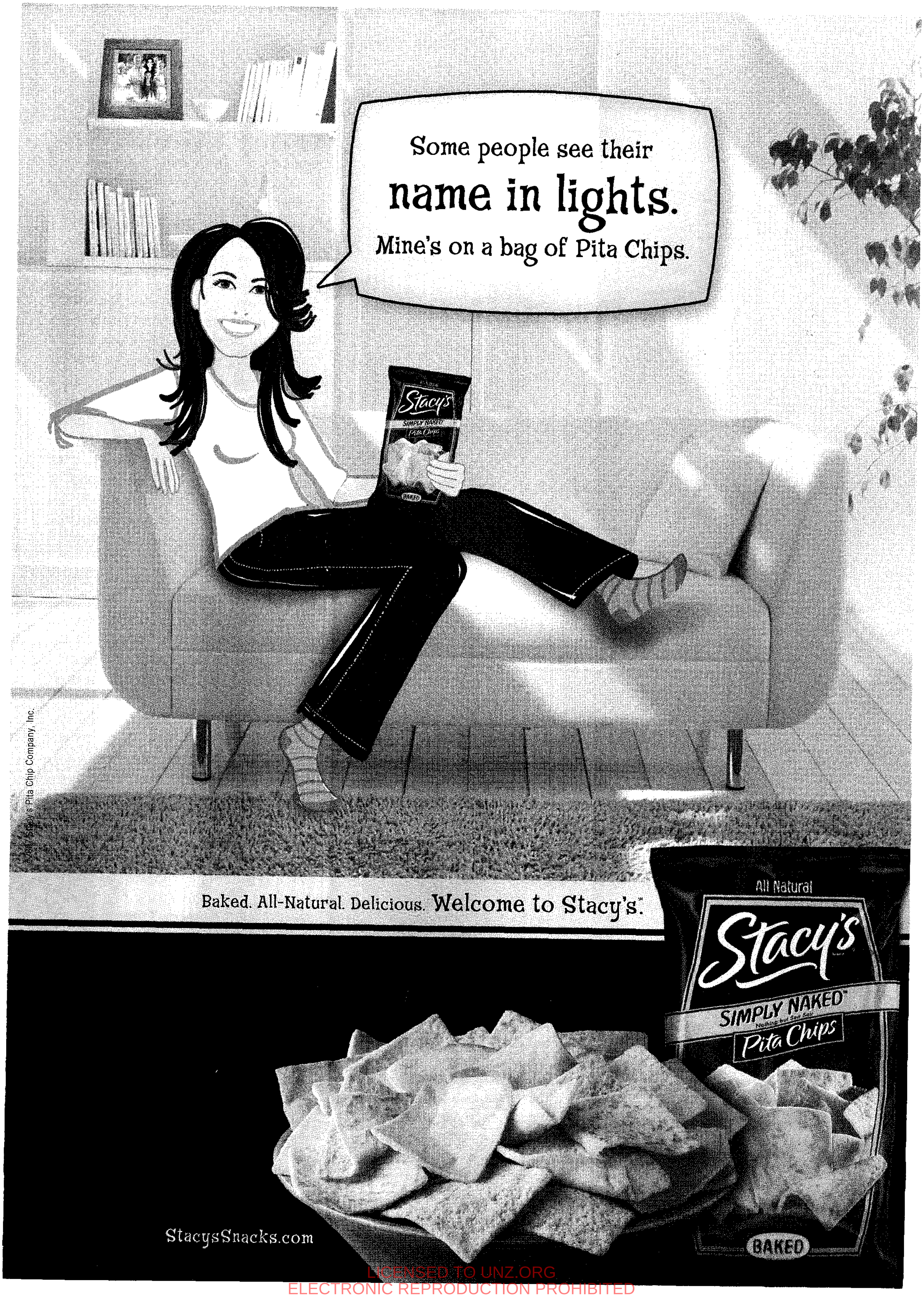
Timoney one day said to me, "There are these things in policing called distracters"—things that prevent a department from performing its core mission. "When a department doesn't have the proper policies and procedures in place, things are going to blow up all the time." The Timoney family's problems were, in a sense, the ultimate distracter. For John Timoney, "the whole thing started" when Christine was about fifteen and left school with a few girlfriends to follow the Grateful Dead around the country, a trek that lasted on and off for several years. "It was insane. The whole thing was insane," Timoney said. When he learned that Christine was spending time near Tompkins Square Park, a high-drug-trafficking area in the East Village, he asked for help from Michael Julian, who had commanded the precinct there two years earlier. "I agreed to drive around the neighborhood with him to all the squatters and drug locations—every block, actually—looking for her. We gave up after a few hours," Julian told me. "I know it was tearing his heart out because he couldn't stop her." Timoney told me that he thought his daughter was going to die.

Christine enrolled in more than a dozen rehabilitation programs. "It just didn't seem that it was ever working," Timoney said. "It ain't even working for a day. The minute she's out, she's gone." One day, when Christine was sixteen, she took the car and vanished. Timoney reported the car stolen, and his daughter was arrested when it was spotted in Oregon. Because she was a juvenile and could not be released without adult supervision, Timoney asked a friend in the F.B.I. to help arrange her return. "A kid that's that bad, the punishment is meaningless, so you try to talk to them," he said. "You love them, and you hope they don't do it again, and they do it again immediately."

In March of 1996, Bratton was pushed out by Giuliani—owing partly to a tense rivalry over sharing crime-fighting credit—and Giuliani named Howard Safir, the fire commissioner, as Bratton's replacement. Timoney, who had expected to get the commissioner's job, spoke angrily and on the record to Mike McAlary. Giuliani, he said, "may be the greatest mayor in this city's history. But Rudy is screwed up. There's something wrong there." As for Safir, Timoney told the columnist, "He's a lightweight." Timoney submitted his resignation, and Giuliani wanted him out of his office at 1 Police Plaza that same day. "I left in a pretty ugly state. I knew I was probably wrong. I shouldn't have run my mouth," Timoney told me.

Cardinal John J. O'Connor, a family friend—he had renewed John and Noreen's vows a month earlier, on their twenty-fifth wedding anniversary—asked him to call. As Timoney recalled the conversation, laughing loudly, O'Connor said, " 'You know everybody in this city knows you should have had that job. That's O.K. Just remember,' he says. 'Jesus Christ didn't become a great commanding officer until he was crucified.' " Suddenly, he had the time to take Christine to her clinic. "A month before, I was the hot shot, big No. 2 in the N.Y.P.D., and now I'm just a father of some junkie, double-parked in my Honda Civic waiting for my kid in rehab. Oh, how the mighty have fallen."

Timoney went to work as a private security consultant, and after two years he was offered the chief's job in Philadelphia, where, for nearly a decade, murders had exceeded four hundred annually, and the department was in the midst of a corruption scandal. Within two years of Timoney's arrival, the number of homicides fell to less than three hundred. "It's not just a number," John Gallagher, who was Timoney's special counsel there, said. "It's like a catastrophic plane crash not happening every year." Timoney became a highly visible personage, showing up on the nightly news and being out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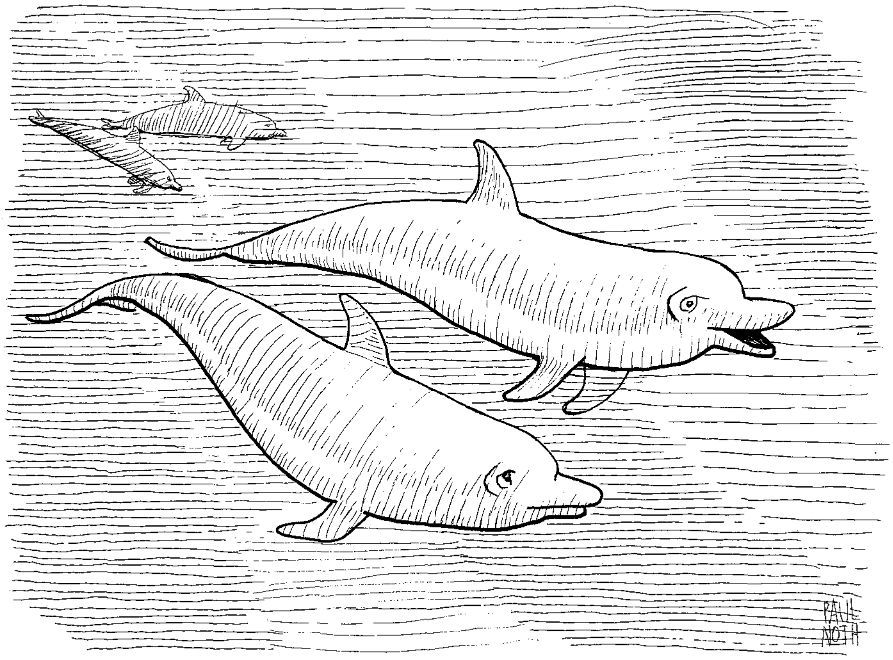

"If I could do only one thing before I died, it would be to swim with a middle-aged couple from Connecticut."

and about with his bike squad. During his first week on the job, while he was out jogging, he caught a purse snatcher; that summer, he startled national law-enforcement leaders by announcing that Philadelphia would not submit its crime statistics to the F.B.I., because those numbers could not be trusted.

Timoney had his distracters in Philadelphia, too. In March, 2001, it was revealed that two officers, a homicide captain and a lieutenant, covered up a drunk-driving accident from three years earlier. Timoney initially gave them what amounted to a twenty-day suspension, but the decision was widely criticized. After the mayor interceded, Timoney publicly reversed himself and demoted the captain, James Brady, who later resigned. (In 2003, both men were cleared of criminal charges, and Brady rejoined the force.) "Clearly, my reputation took a hit," Timoney said then. He did not welcome a fresh discussion of the incident, and when I asked about it he said, "Brady was a very good police officer and didn't deserve the treatment he received from the press." He also said, "The press is a double-edged sword, and they will give you up in a minute to get a headline."

Philadelphia police received more negative publicity just before the Republican National Convention in 2000, when fourteen officers were videotaped beating and kicking a man suspected in a twelve-day carjacking-and-robbery spree. (A grand jury refused to indict any of the police; the suspect, Thomas Jones, who had been shot five times, ultimately pleaded guilty.) And while Timoney was initially praised for the way the department dealt with protesters at the Convention, he was later accused of overzealousness; most of the charges against the protesters were quickly dismissed. But when Timoney announced, in December, 2001, that he was leaving, an editorial in the Philadelphia *Inquirer* called his departure "a monumental loss." The murder rate in Philadelphia has since returned to pre-Timoney levels, and one mayoral candidate is vowing to bring him back.

Timoney said publicly that he left Philadelphia because he once more wanted to earn money in the private sector, but it was clear from our conversations that almost every aspect of the job had worn him down. He fought constantly with the union, the Fraternal Order of Police, which opposed many of his disciplinary actions, and found it almost impossible to promote on merit because of the department's civil-service policies. He spent great amounts of time in arbitration hearings and on depositions that almost always favored the disciplined cop. Timoney has always had a tendency to lash out at his critics and acknowledges that this only made things worse for him. By his own account, he began one meeting that was intended to patch things up with a union leader by saying, "Who the fuck do you think you're talking to?" But the final provocation, Timoney said, may have been the call telling him that he owed nearly two thousand dollars in parking tickets, all issued in a single month. Timoney learned that his son had used the car, and he paid the fines; he also says that a high-ranking officer informed him that some of the tickets were probably "ghosts"—made-up infractions. "It started to get real ugly with the union, and personal," Timoney said. His next job was with a private security firm in New York run by the former N.Y.P.D. celebrity detective Richard (Bo) Dietl.

When Timoney got a call in November, 2002, asking if he was interested in talking to Manny Diaz, the mayor of Miami, he didn't hesitate. "The private sector—there's money there, but it's boring. God, it's boring," he told me. Within a week, Timoney, who had never been to Miami, was meeting with Diaz, a Cuban-born lawyer who had been elected a year earlier. "The city was going nowhere fast," Diaz recalled telling Timoney. Miami, a city with a population of three hundred and eighty-six thousand, had been on the verge of bankruptcy and was recovering from a junk-bond rating from Wall Street. F.B.I. raids on City Hall were not unusual, and a handful of top city officials had been arrested and jailed. Crime and police brutality, particularly the reckless police shootings, had done serious damage to Miami's reputation, and Diaz told Timoney that repairing the police department was a key to revitalizing the city.

Timoney agreed to take the job, which came with an annual salary of a hundred and seventy-three thousand dollars, making him the highest-paid city employee. Right away, he recruited people he could count on, such as John Gallagher, who had left Philadelphia to work as a federal prosecutor on civil-rights cases in New Mexico. Timoney sent Gallagher the Miami use-of-force policy and asked him to give it a critical look. His aims were clear: he wanted deadly force used only as a last resort, when someone's life was in danger. The old policy had focussed simply on when it was legal to pull the trigger.

He also called Louis Vega, a former undercover officer in the N.Y.P.D., who was expected to become the chief of police in Hartford. Timoney asked Vega to head up the Miami Internal Affairs Division. "I was covering my back, and I wanted to send a message," Timoney explained. "This is where the secrets are kept, and information is power. By having a very tough guy in there, my guy, I was keeping them on their toes." Vega decided to forgo Hartford.

Timoney asked Frank Fernandez, a forty-two-year-old lieutenant commander, to be his second-in-command. Fernandez had overseen the rescue and roundup of two hundred and twenty Haitian refugees in 2002, when their boat ran aground in Key Biscayne; he did this even though the effort was not officially his responsibility. "He actually saved the day for everybody in South Florida, and, you know, he didn't have to," Timoney said.

Fernandez was standing with two of his deputies in a small conference room when I stopped by his office, one wall of which was covered with maps dotted with robbery sites. Fernandez believes that the gun culture of the Miami Police Department had its roots in the 1980 Mariel boatlift, when a hundred and twenty-five thousand Cubans landed in Miami over a six-month period. A small percentage of these refugees were criminals and mental patients released by Castro, but they received much of the blame for a crime wave then gripping the city. In this climate, the department went through a rapid turnover and expansion—losing about four hundred experienced officers and hiring twice that many recruits. "The background investigation at that point was really very, very poor, and that's when they started hiring these cops that shouldn't have been officers," Fernandez explained. The new cops drew their guns more often.

Timoney's changes angered some cops, Fernandez told me; officers worried that they were in danger, and at roll calls "you could sense the frustration in the room." Timoney heard them out, Fernandez said, and then explained why his policy would help them. He pointed out the obvious danger of shooting a driver—turning a car into a four-thousand-pound unguided missile. He armed his officers with Tasers—stun guns—but he also told them not to be afraid to use their guns to defend themselves.

Timoney and Fernandez established accountability not only in the use of force but in the chain of command: at roll calls, Timoney made it clear that he was going to hold supervisors, particularly the sergeants, accountable for everything their officers did. According to Timoney, Miami has one of the few, if not the only, police departments in the country which require the supervising sergeant to go to the scene on critical calls and announce on police radio that he's taking charge.

Al Cotera, a former president of the Fraternal Order of Police in Miami, told me that during an international trade summit held ten months after Timoney's arrival the Chief was "out there on a bicycle" at the front of the pack. Miami police had been anticipating riots similar to what Seattle saw in 1999, and forty law-enforcement agencies had been called in to help. The protests turned out to be smaller than expected, but there were complaints about police aggressiveness. A judge, Richard Margolius, who observed the protests, said that he saw "no less than twenty felonies committed by police officers," and John Sweeney, the head of the A.F.L.-C.I.O., who had once been friendly with Timoney, called for the Chief's resignation, saying that the police thwarted union members' access to rallies. A civilian review board later reported acts of police misconduct but said that most officers had "conducted themselves admirably."

In November, 2005, Timoney's son, Sean, and another man, Jae Seu, were arrested by D.E.A. officers in a Rockland County sting and charged in federal court with one count of trying to buy and distribute about four hundred pounds of marijuana for four hundred and fifty-five thousand dollars, a felony that carries a potential sentence of up to forty years in prison. Seu had been the target of

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the investigation; Sean had not been involved in the drug negotiations, but he had agreed to drive Seu and carried a gym bag stuffed with money into the hotel room that the D.E.A. had been watching.

At the time, Timoney and his son hadn't spoken in nearly two years. Timoney told me that their relationship began to deteriorate when Sean, who had been a star high-school soccer player and captain of his team, suffered a knee injury that ended his athletic career. Sean also had a mysterious debilitating illness that was later diagnosed as a severe case of Lyme disease. "He couldn't even get up. He couldn't stay awake in class. He could not function," Noreen Timoney recalled. Sean, she added, "idolized his father. His father was everything." But John, she said, never accepted that his son's problems might have a medical cause, and he showed an impatience close to indifference. "He could not come to grips with that, because that's not how he would handle it," she said. "If John had gotten Lyme disease, he would have come back stronger. But Sean is not John."

When Timoney took the chief's job in Philadelphia, in 1998, Noreen stayed in New York to see Sean through high school and to deal with Christine's drug problems—a separation that lasted for nearly two years. "I think he knew that I would be there to pick up the pieces and to do what had to be done," Noreen said. After finishing high school, Sean moved with his mother to Philadelphia, where he enrolled at St. Joseph's University. But he dropped out, citing medical reasons, and never returned. That did it, Timoney said. "He's completely unlike me. I wouldn't talk to him, and he wouldn't talk to me." When I asked if his son's problems might have been exacerbated by his injuries and illnesses, Timoney cut me off. "I don't buy any of that stuff. I just don't. Listen, you can come up with all sorts of excuses in life."

Sean began delivering pizzas. He wouldn't return his father's phone calls. His lawyer—the star criminal-defense specialist Edward Hayes, a family friend—later said that Sean felt "isolated and abandoned," suffered from depression, and had turned to marijuana as "a way to escape his psychological and physical problems." Christine Timoney told me that she felt partly responsible for her brother's woes. "I felt this guilt that I had kind of messed up his life because all my stuff started in his really important developing years," she said. "My parents always joked that my brother was an angel baby and I was horrible from the get," she added. She told her father to show some compassion. Timoney said that Christine would yell at him, "You don't understand—he just wants to die!"

A LETTER TO SU T'UNG PO

Almost a thousand years later
I am asking the same questions
you did the ones you kept finding
yourself returning to as though
nothing had changed except the tone
of their echo growing deeper
and what you knew of the coming
of age before you had grown old
I do not know any more now
than you did then about what you
were asking as I sit at night
above the hushed valley thinking
of you on your river that one
bright sheet of moonlight in the dream
of the water birds and I hear
the silence after your questions
how old are the questions tonight

—*W. S. Merwin*

John Timoney told Hayes he was not going to post bail. "Eddy kept calling me," Timoney recalled. "I said, 'No. I haven't talked to the kid. Let him just rot in there. I don't give a shit.'" On about the third or fourth day, he said, Hayes called again. Timoney finally relented and put up the family's Miami condominium as collateral. Sean, on his father's advice, pleaded guilty, and while awaiting sentencing this past December, he entered a drug-rehabilitation program and started working as a concrete laborer. "But of course he's set the race back a hundred and fifty years. That's what we did in 1840," Timoney said, not quite enjoying his joke.

Much of what John Timoney has done as a policeman in Miami is no longer particularly novel, but a lot of it was new to Miami—and, in retrospect, seems obvious and necessary. For instance, like many cities, Miami had adopted a version of CompStat, but in Timoney's view it was a kind of "faux CompStat," with little follow-up. A sensational series of rapes in which three young Latina girls were attacked alerted Timoney to the fact that DNA from earlier rapes in which the suspect was unknown was not being cross-checked—no one knew if this was the rapist's first attack or his tenth. DNA was checked only after a suspect had been arrested. Timoney, who had discovered a similar problem in Philadelphia, said, "If you think about it for a second, the costs were not only monetary in terms of overtime but what economists call 'opportunity' costs. By having all those detectives and uniformed officers, including myself and the other chiefs, focussed on this case, we lost the opportunity to be working on something else."

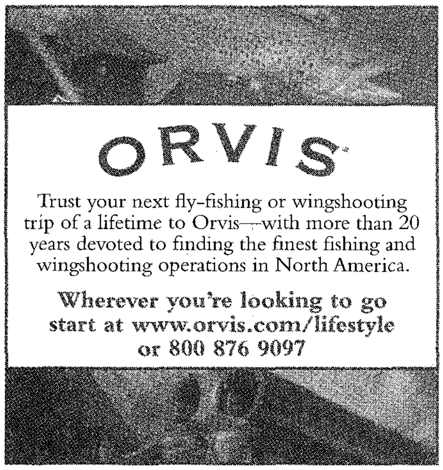
"Listen, I'm not some bleeding-heart liberal," Timoney told me over dinner one night. Had he ever thrown an extra punch at a suspect in custody? "I'm sure I did," he replied. "It would be in the heat of battle, which is why I understand these things. Most people thought that the Rodney King thing was horrible because he was hit. He was a defenseless guy hit fifty-six times. That was true. But, from a policing perspective, what was the most troubling—he didn't get killed, he was O.K., and he made money—what was most troubling is that you had more than twenty cops there, including two sergeants, and not one person stepped in and said, 'Hey, listen. Stop it. You're going to kill this guy.' So the assumption is that when we're chasing this guy, and we're beating the piss out of him because we've been chasing him, the cop that arrives two or three minutes later, he's got just as much an obligation to stop it as anybody else." He said that is why he had added a "duty to intervene" in the revised use-of-force policy.

In mid-December, Timoney travelled to Albany for his son's sentencing. He had not planned to attend, because newspaper stories suggested that Sean, whose sentencing had twice been postponed, was receiving special treatment. Since his arrest, nearly sixteen months earlier, there had been some reconciliation between father and son: Sean had visited Miami several times, including last spring for Father's Day, and again for Thanksgiving. Before the sentencing, Timoney seemed to have mixed feelings about what lay ahead. "Sometimes you need the lever of the criminal-justice system to jerk somebody," he said. He also said, "This is one of those times when I wish I wasn't his father, because then he would be treated like everybody else. He'd get probation. First-time offense. Never been in trouble before. It's marijuana, and it was not his stuff. He was driving. He was making money. Don't get me wrong. He was wrong, and that's what I told him: 'You're wrong. You plead guilty. Throw yourself on the mercy of the court, and tell them what you've done.' By the way, they know, because they had wiretaps. This is one of the cases where the wiretaps are very helpful, because they show what a schmuck he is."

At Sean's sentencing, while John and Noreen Timoney listened, Hayes recounted Sean's injuries and illnesses and said that Sean had not used drugs since his arrest. Calling Timoney part of the trio of police leaders who "turned the tide in New York City," Hayes spoke to the judge about the life of a policeman: "They all have problems with their marriages. Many of them have problems with their kids, because they're never home. All right. So that was the special treatment that John and Noreen Timoney got, and in return for all of that heartache what they gave back was safety and a better life in a very dramatic way for New York City."

Sean Timoney asked U.S. District Court Judge Thomas J. McAvoy's permission to speak—very briefly, it turned out. "I was addicted to drugs," he said, and "really, that's, you know, what the money was being used for." The Judge then sentenced Sean to eighteen months in federal prison. John Timoney had thought that his son would be sentenced to a year and released in six months—that he had demonstrated that he had straightened out his life. "He did all that, so the sentencing almost becomes pointless. It was just bad," he told me. John and Noreen went back to New York in January to be with Sean on the night before he went to prison—to help him pack up his apartment and store his furniture. Then they drove their son to the prison's entrance. "Not a fun day, but I spoke to him twice last week, and he seems to be managing, though he says it is worse than he expected," John Timoney told me. "Two good points: he gave up smoking, cold turkey, and has read his first books, well over four hundred pages." Noreen Timoney said that Sean had kept saying, "I'm sorry I disappointed you and I love you."

Neither of the Timoneys will talk about the evident strains in their marriage. They refer to each other with affection; Noreen at one point remarked, "It's one of those strange Irish relationships." Christine Timoney has not used drugs in seven years, and late last year she moved to Florida to be closer to her parents and to begin work in a drug-rehabilitation center; she has a year-old baby and lives with the baby's father. She told me that she had become determined to get off drugs after one particular visit by her father in New York. "He was like, 'I'm just scared the next place I'm going to visit you is the grave,'" she recalled. "It just sort of hit me: no, he does care, and this is killing him." Her father recently teased her, saying that her baby was much easier than she had ever been, and she replied, "Daddy, God only gives you what you can handle." ♦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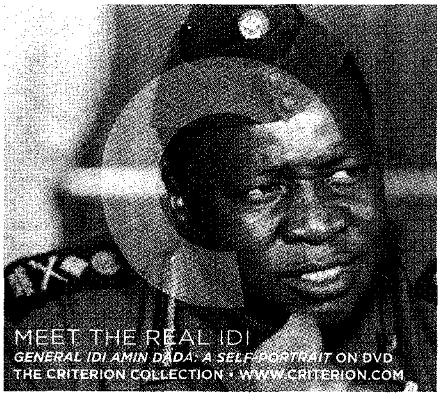
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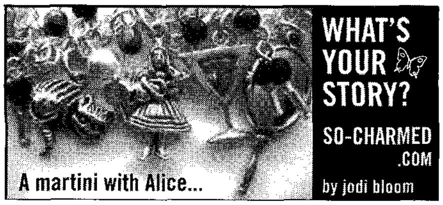
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ANNALS OF NATIONAL SECURITY

THE REDIRECTION

Is the Administration's new policy benefitting our enemies in the war on terrorism?

BY SEYMOUR M. HERSH

A STRATEGIC SHIFT

In the past few months, as the situation in Iraq has deteriorated, the Bush Administration, in both its public diplomacy and its covert operations, has significantly shifted its Middle East strategy. The "redirection," as some inside the White House have called the new strategy, has brought the United States closer to an open confrontation with Iran and, in parts of the region, propelled it into a widening sectarian conflict between Shiite and Sunni Muslims.

To undermine Iran, which is predominantly Shiite, the Bush Administration has decided, in effect, to reconfigure its priorities in the Middle East. In Lebanon, the Administration has coöperated with Saudi Arabia's government, which is Sunni, in clandestine operations that are intended to weaken Hezbollah, the Shiite organization that is backed by Iran. The U.S. has also taken part in clandestine operations aimed at Iran and its ally Syria. A by-product of these activities has been the bolstering of Sunni extremist groups that espouse a militant vision of Islam and are hostile to America and sympathetic to Al Qaeda.

One contradictory aspect of the new strategy is that, in Iraq, most of the insurgent violence directed at the American military has come from Sunni forces, and not from Shiites. But, from the Administration's perspective, the most profound—and unintended—strategic consequence of the Iraq war is the empowerment of Iran. Its President, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, has made defiant pronouncements about the destruction of Israel and his country's right to pursue its nuclear program, and last week its supreme religious leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, said on state television that "realities in the region show that the arrogant front, headed by the U.S. and its allies, will be the principal loser in the region."

After the revolution of 1979 brought a religious government to power, the United States broke with Iran and cultivated closer relations with the leaders of Sunni Arab states such as Jordan, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia. That calculation became more complex after the September 11th attacks, especially with regard to the Saudis. Al Qaeda is Sunni, and many of its operatives came from extremist religious circles inside Saudi Arabia. Before the invasion of Iraq, in 2003, Administration officials, influenced by neoconservative ideologues, assumed that a Shiite government there could provide a pro-American balance to Sunni extremists, since Iraq's Shiite majority had been oppressed under Saddam Hussein. They ignored warnings from the intelligence community about the ties between Iraqi Shiite leaders and Iran, where some had lived in exile for years. Now, to the distress of the White House, Iran has forged a close relationship with the Shiite-dominated government of Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki.

The new American policy, in its broad outlines, has been discussed publicly. In testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in January, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said that there is "a new strategic alignment in the Middle East," separating "reformers" and "extremists"; she pointed to the Sunni states as centers of moderation, and said that Iran, Syria, and Hezbollah were "on the other side of that divide." (Syria's Sunni majority is dominated by the Alawi sect.) Iran and Syria, she said, "have made their choice and their choice is to destabilize."

Some of the core tactics of the redirection are not public, however. The clandestine operations have been kept secret, in some cases, by leaving the execution or the funding to the Saudis, or by finding other ways to work around the normal congressional appropriations process, current and former officials close to the Administration said.

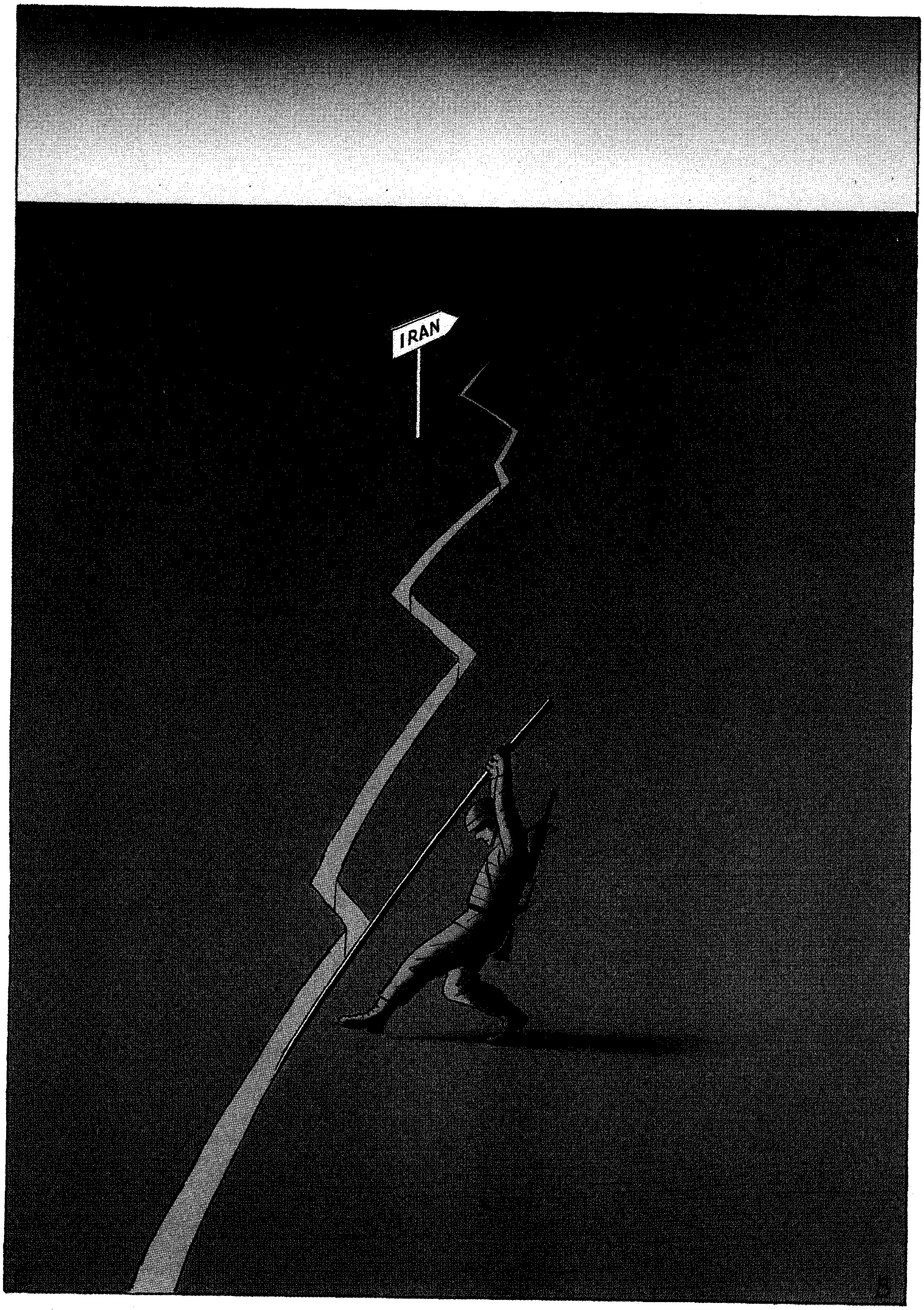
A senior member of the House Appropriations Committee told me that he had heard about the new strategy, but felt that he and his colleagues had not been adequately briefed. "We haven't got any of this," he said. "We ask for anything going on, and they say there's nothing. And when we ask specific questions they say, 'We're going to get back to you.' It's so frustrating."

The key players behind the redirection are Vice-President Dick Cheney, the deputy national-security adviser Elliott Abrams, the departing Ambassador to Iraq (and nominee for United Nations Ambassador), Zalmay Khalilzad, and Prince Bandar bin Sultan, the Saudi national-security adviser. While Rice has been deeply involved in shaping the public policy, former and current officials said that the clandestine side has been guided by Cheney. (Cheney's office and the White House declined to comment for this story; the Pentagon did not respond to specific queries but said, "The United States is not planning to go to war with Iran.")

The policy shift has brought Saudi Arabia and Israel into a new strategic embrace, largely because both countries see Iran as an existential threat. They have been involved in direct talks, and the Saudis, who believe that greater stability in Israel and Palestine will give Iran less leverage in the region, have become more involved in Arab-Israeli negotiations.

The new strategy "is a major shift in American policy—it's a sea change," a U.S. government consultant with close ties to Israel said. The Sunni states "were petrified of a Shiite resurgence, and there was growing resentment with our gam-

Efforts to curb Iran's influence have involved the United States in worsening Sunni-Shiite tensions.



GUY BILLOUT

bling on the moderate Shiites in Iraq," he said. "We cannot reverse the Shiite gain in Iraq, but we can contain it."

"It seems there has been a debate inside the government over what's the biggest danger—Iran or Sunni radicals," Vali Nasr, a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, who has written widely on Shiites, Iran, and Iraq, told me. "The Saudis and some in the Administration have been arguing that the biggest threat is Iran and the Sunni radicals are the lesser enemies. This is a victory for the Saudi line."

Martin Indyk, a senior State Department official in the Clinton Administration who also served as Ambassador to Israel, said that "the Middle East is heading into a serious Sunni-Shiite Cold War." Indyk, who is the director of the Saban Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution, added that, in his opinion, it was not clear whether the White House was fully aware of the strategic implications of its new policy. "The White House is not just doubling the bet in Iraq," he said. "It's doubling the bet across the region. This could get very complicated. Everything is upside down."

The Administration's new policy for containing Iran seems to complicate its strategy for winning the war in Iraq. Patrick Clawson, an expert on Iran and the deputy director for research at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, argued, however, that closer ties between the United States and moderate or even radical Sunnis could put "fear" into the government of Prime Minister Maliki and "make him worry that the Sunnis could actually win" the civil war there. Clawson said that this might give Maliki an incentive to coöperate with the United States in suppressing radical Shiite militias, such as Moqtada al-Sadr's Mahdi Army.

Even so, for the moment, the U.S. remains dependent on the coöperation of Iraqi Shiite leaders. The Mahdi Army may be openly hostile to American interests, but other Shiite militias are counted as U.S. allies. Both Moqtada al-Sadr and the White House back Maliki. A memorandum written late last year by Stephen Hadley, the national-security adviser, suggested that the Administration try to separate Maliki from his more radical Shiite allies by building his base among moderate Sunnis and Kurds, but so far the trends have been in the opposite direction. As the Iraqi Army continues to founder in its confrontations with insurgents, the power of the Shiite militias has steadily increased.

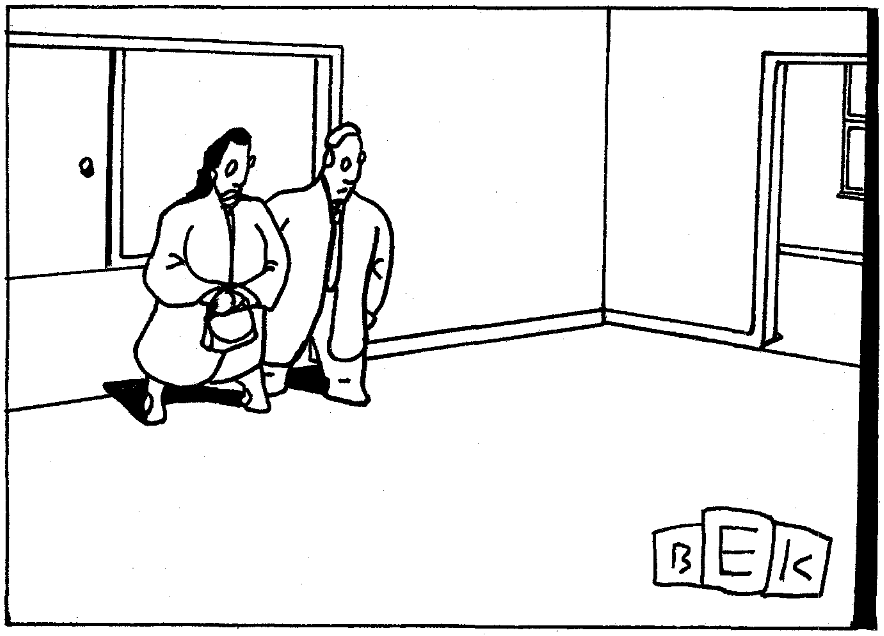
Flynt Leverett, a former Bush Administration National Security Council official, told me that "there is nothing coincidental or ironic" about the new strategy with regard to Iraq. "The Administration is trying to make a case that Iran is more dangerous and more provocative than the Sunni insurgents to American interests in Iraq, when—if you look at the actual casualty numbers—the punishment inflicted on America by the Sunnis is greater by an order of magnitude," Leverett said. "This is all part of the campaign of provocative steps to increase the pressure on Iran. The idea is that at some point the Iranians will respond and then the Administration will have an open door to strike at them."

President George W. Bush, in a speech on January 10th, partially spelled out this approach. "These two regimes"—Iran and Syria—"are allowing terrorists and insurgents to use their territory to move in and out of Iraq," Bush said. "Iran is providing material support for attacks on American troops. We will disrupt the attacks on our forces. We'll interrupt the flow of support from Iran and Syria. And we will seek out and destroy the networks providing advanced weaponry and training to our enemies in Iraq."

In the following weeks, there was a wave of allegations from the Administration about Iranian involvement in the Iraq war. On February 11th, reporters were shown sophisticated explosive devices, captured in Iraq, that the Administration claimed had come from Iran. The Administration's message was, in essence, that the bleak situation in Iraq was the result not of its own failures of planning and execution but of Iran's interference.

The U.S. military also has arrested and interrogated hundreds of Iranians in Iraq. "The word went out last August for the military to snatch as many Iranians in Iraq as they can," a former senior intelligence official said. "They had five hundred locked up at one time. We're working these guys and getting information from them. The White House goal is to build a case that the Iranians have been fomenting the insurgency and they've been doing it all along—that Iran is, in fact, supporting the killing of Americans." The Pentagon consultant confirmed that hundreds of Iranians have been captured by American forces in recent months. But he told me that that total includes many Iranian humanitarian and aid workers who "get scooped up and released in a short time," after they have been interrogated.

"We are not planning for a war with Iran," Robert Gates, the new Defense Secretary, announced on February 2nd,



"Would our big tacky objects look good here?"

and yet the atmosphere of confrontation has deepened. According to current and former American intelligence and military officials, secret operations in Lebanon have been accompanied by clandestine operations targeting Iran. American military and special-operations teams have escalated their activities in Iran to gather intelligence and, according to a Pentagon consultant on terrorism and the former senior intelligence official, have also crossed the border in pursuit of Iranian operatives from Iraq.

At Rice's Senate appearance in January, Democratic Senator Joseph Biden, of Delaware, pointedly asked her whether the U.S. planned to cross the Iranian or the Syrian border in the course of a pursuit. "Obviously, the President isn't going to rule anything out to protect our troops, but the plan is to take down these networks in Iraq," Rice said, adding, "I do think that everyone will understand that—the American people and I assume the Congress expect the President to do what is necessary to protect our forces."

The ambiguity of Rice's reply prompted a response from Nebraska Senator Chuck Hagel, a Republican, who has been critical of the Administration:

> Some of us remember 1970, Madam Secretary. And that was Cambodia. And when our government lied to the American people and said, "We didn't cross the border going into Cambodia," in fact we did.
>
> I happen to know something about that, as do some on this committee. So, Madam Secretary, when you set in motion the kind of policy that the President is talking about here, it's very, very dangerous.

The Administration's concern about Iran's role in Iraq is coupled with its longstanding alarm over Iran's nuclear program. On Fox News on January 14th, Cheney warned of the possibility, in a few years, "of a nuclear-armed Iran, astride the world's supply of oil, able to affect adversely the global economy, prepared to use terrorist organizations and/or their nuclear weapons to threaten their neighbors and others around the world." He also said, "If you go and talk with the Gulf states or if you talk with the Saudis or if you talk with the Israelis or the Jordanians, the entire region is worried. . . . The threat Iran represents is growing."

The Administration is now examining a wave of new intelligence on Iran's weapons programs. Current and former American officials told me that the intelligence, which came from Israeli agents operating in Iran, includes a claim that Iran has developed a three-stage solid-fuelled intercontinental missile capable of delivering several small warheads—each with limited accuracy—inside Europe. The validity of this human intelligence is still being debated.

A similar argument about an imminent threat posed by weapons of mass destruction—and questions about the intelligence used to make that case—formed the prelude to the invasion of Iraq. Many in Congress have greeted the claims about Iran with wariness; in the Senate on February 14th, Hillary Clinton said, "We have all learned lessons from the conflict in Iraq, and we have to apply those lessons to any allegations that are being raised about Iran. Because, Mr. President, what we are hearing has too familiar a ring and we must be on guard that we never again make decisions on the basis of intelligence that turns out to be faulty."

Still, the Pentagon is continuing intensive planning for a possible bombing attack on Iran, a process that began last year, at the direction of the President. In recent months, the former intelligence official told me, a special planning group has been established in the offices of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, charged with creating a contingency bombing plan for Iran that can be implemented, upon orders from the President, within twenty-four hours.

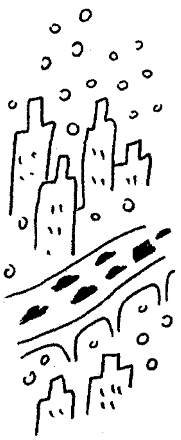
In the past month, I was told by an Air Force adviser on targeting and the Pentagon consultant on terrorism, the Iran planning group has been handed a new assignment: to identify targets in Iran that may be involved in supplying or aiding militants in Iraq. Previously, the focus had been on the destruction of Iran's nuclear facilities and possible regime change.

Two carrier strike groups—the Eisenhower and the Stennis—are now in the Arabian Sea. One plan is for them to be relieved early in the spring, but there is worry within the military that they may be ordered to stay in the area after the new carriers arrive, according to several sources. (Among other concerns, war games have shown that the carriers could be vulnerable to swarming tactics involving large numbers of small boats, a technique that the Iranians have practiced in the past; carriers have limited maneuverability in the narrow Strait of Hormuz, off Iran's southern coast.) The former senior intelligence official said that the current contingency plans allow for an attack order this spring. He added, however, that senior officers on the Joint Chiefs were counting on the White House's not being "foolish enough to do this in the face of Iraq, and the problems it would give the Republicans in 2008."

PRINCE BANDAR'S GAME

The Administration's effort to diminish Iranian authority in the Middle East has relied heavily on Saudi Arabia and on Prince Bandar, the Saudi national-security adviser. Bandar served as the Ambassador to the United States for twenty-two years, until 2005, and has maintained a friendship with President Bush and Vice-President Cheney. In his new post, he continues to meet privately with them. Senior White House officials have made several visits to Saudi Arabia recently, some of them not disclosed.

Last November, Cheney flew to Saudi Arabia for a surprise meeting with King Abdullah and Bandar. The *Times* reported that the King warned Cheney that Saudi Arabia would back its fellow-Sunnis in Iraq if the United States were to withdraw. A European intelligence official told me that the meeting also focussed on more general Saudi fears about "the rise of the Shiites." In response, "The Saudis are starting to use their leverage—money."



In a royal family rife with competition, Bandar has, over the years, built a power base that relies largely on his close relationship with the U.S., which is crucial to the Saudis. Bandar was succeeded as Ambassador by Prince Turki al-Faisal; Turki resigned after eighteen months and was replaced by Adel A. al-Jubeir, a bureaucrat who has worked with Bandar. A former Saudi diplomat told me that during Turki's tenure he became aware of private meetings involving Bandar and senior White House officials, including Cheney and Abrams. "I assume Turki was not happy with that," the Saudi said. But, he added, "I don't think that Bandar is going off on his own." Although Turki dislikes Bandar, the Saudi said, he shared his goal of challenging the spread of Shiite power in the Middle East.

The split between Shiites and Sunnis goes back to a bitter divide, in the seventh century, over who should succeed the Prophet Muhammad. Sunnis dominated the medieval caliphate and the Ottoman Empire, and Shiites, traditionally, have been regarded more as outsiders. Worldwide, ninety per cent of Muslims are Sunni, but Shiites are a majority in Iran, Iraq, and Bahrain, and are the largest Muslim group in Lebanon. Their concentration in a volatile, oil-rich region has led to concern in the West and among Sunnis about the emergence of a "Shiite crescent"—especially given Iran's increased geopolitical weight.

"The Saudis still see the world through the days of the Ottoman Empire, when Sunni Muslims ruled the roost and the Shiites were the lowest class," Frederic Hof, a retired military officer who is an expert on the Middle East, told me. If Bandar was seen as bringing about a shift in U.S. policy in favor of the Sunnis, he added, it would greatly enhance his standing within the royal family.

The Saudis are driven by their fear that Iran could tilt the balance of power not only in the region but within their own country. Saudi Arabia has a significant Shiite minority in its Eastern Province, a region of major oil fields; sectarian tensions are high in the province. The royal family believes that Iranian operatives, working with local Shiites, have been behind many terrorist attacks inside the kingdom, according to Vali Nasr. "Today, the only army capable of containing Iran"—the Iraqi Army—"has been destroyed by the United States. You're now dealing with an Iran that could be nuclear-capable and has a standing army of four hundred and fifty thousand soldiers." (Saudi Arabia has seventy-five thousand troops in its standing army.)

Nasr went on, "The Saudis have considerable financial means, and have deep relations with the Muslim Brotherhood and the Salafis"—Sunni extremists who view Shiites as apostates. "The last time Iran was a threat, the Saudis were able to mobilize the worst kinds of Islamic radicals. Once you get them out of the box, you can't put them back."

The Saudi royal family has been, by turns, both a sponsor and a target of Sunni extremists, who object to the corruption and decadence among the family's myriad princes. The princes are gambling that they will not be overthrown as long as they continue to support religious schools and charities linked to the extremists. The Administration's new strategy is heavily dependent on this bargain.

Nasr compared the current situation to the period in which Al Qaeda first emerged. In the nineteen-eighties and the early nineties, the Saudi government offered to subsidize the covert American C.I.A. proxy war against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan. Hundreds of young Saudis were sent into the border areas of Pakistan, where they set up religious schools, training bases, and recruiting facilities. Then, as now, many of the operatives who were paid with Saudi money were Salafis. Among them, of course, were Osama bin Laden and his associates, who founded Al Qaeda, in 1988.

This time, the U.S. government consultant told me, Bandar and other Saudis have assured the White House that "they will keep a very close eye on the religious fundamentalists. Their message to us was 'We've created this movement, and we can control it.' It's not that we don't want the Salafis to throw bombs; it's *who* they throw them at—Hezbollah, Moqtada al-Sadr, Iran, and at the Syrians, if they continue to work with Hezbollah and Iran."

The Saudi said that, in his country's view, it was taking a political risk by joining the U.S. in challenging Iran: Bandar is already seen in the Arab world as being too close to the Bush Administration. "We have two nightmares," the former diplomat told me. "For Iran to acquire the bomb and for the United States to attack Iran. I'd rather the Israelis bomb the Iranians, so we can blame them. If America does it, we will be blamed."

In the past year, the Saudis, the Israelis, and the Bush Administration have developed a series of informal understandings about their new strategic direction. At least four main elements were involved, the U.S. government consultant told me. First, Israel would be assured that its security was paramount and that Washington and Saudi Arabia and other Sunni states shared its concern about Iran.

Second, the Saudis would urge Hamas, the Islamist Palestinian party that has received support from Iran, to curtail its anti-Israeli aggression and to begin serious talks about sharing leadership with Fatah, the more secular Palestinian group. (In February, the Saudis brokered a deal at Mecca between the two factions. However, Israel and the U.S. have expressed dissatisfaction with the terms.)

The third component was that the Bush Administration would work directly with Sunni nations to counteract Shiite ascendance in the region.

Fourth, the Saudi government, with Washington's approval, would provide funds and logistical aid to weaken the government of President Bashir Assad, of Syria. The Israelis believe that putting such pressure on the Assad government will make it more conciliatory and open to negotiations. Syria is a major conduit of arms to Hezbollah. The Saudi government is also at odds with the Syrians over the assassination of Rafik Hariri, the former Lebanese Prime Minister, in Beirut in 2005, for which it believes the Assad government was responsible. Hariri, a billionaire Sunni, was closely associated with the Saudi regime and with Prince Bandar. (A U.N. inquiry strongly suggested that the Syrians were involved, but offered no direct evidence; there are plans for another investigation, by an international tribunal.)

Patrick Clawson, of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, depicted the Saudis' coöperation with the White House as a significant breakthrough. "The Saudis understand that if they want the Administration to make a more generous political offer to the Palestinians they have to persuade the Arab states to make a more generous offer to the Israelis," Clawson told me. The new diplomatic approach, he added, "shows a real degree of effort and sophistication as well as a deftness of touch not always associated with this Administration. Who's running the greater risk—we or the Saudis? At a time when America's standing in the Middle East is extremely low, the Saudis are actually embracing us. We should count our blessings."

The Pentagon consultant had a different view. He said that the Administration had turned to Bandar as a "fallback," because it had realized that the failing war in Iraq could leave the Middle East "up for grabs."

JIHADIS IN LEBANON

The focus of the U.S.-Saudi relationship, after Iran, is Lebanon, where the Saudis have been deeply involved in efforts by the Administration to support the Lebanese government. Prime Minister Fouad Siniora is struggling to stay in power against a persistent opposition led by Hezbollah, the Shiite organization, and its leader, Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah. Hezbollah has an extensive infrastructure, an estimated two to three thousand active fighters, and thousands of additional members.

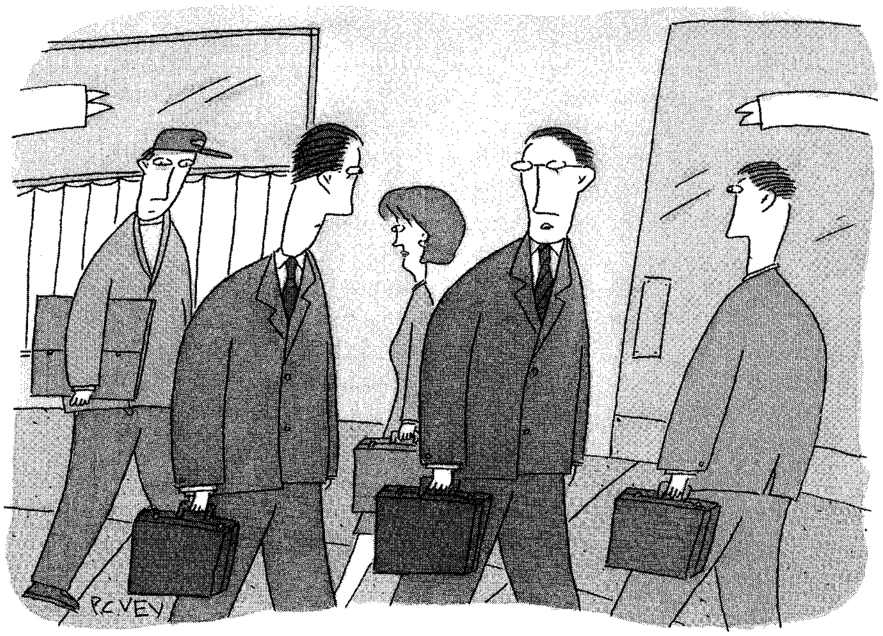
Hezbollah has been on the State Department's terrorist list since 1997. The organization has been implicated in the 1983 bombing of a Marine barracks in Beirut that killed two hundred and forty-one military men. It has also been accused of complicity in the kidnapping of Americans, including the C.I.A. station chief in Lebanon, who died in captivity, and a Marine colonel serving on a U.N. peacekeeping mission, who was killed. (Nasrallah has denied that the group was involved in these incidents.) Nasrallah is seen by many as a staunch terrorist, who has said that he regards Israel as a state that has no right to exist. Many in the Arab world, however, especially Shiites, view him as a resistance leader who withstood Israel in last summer's thirty-three-day war, and Siniora as a weak politician who relies on America's support but was unable to persuade President Bush to call for an end to the Israeli bombing of Lebanon. (Photographs of Siniora kissing Condoleezza Rice on the cheek when she visited during the war were prominently displayed during street protests in Beirut.)

The Bush Administration has publicly pledged the Siniora government a billion dollars in aid since last summer. A donors' conference in Paris, in January, which the U.S. helped organize, yielded pledges of almost eight billion more, including a promise of more than a billion from the Saudis. The American pledge includes more than two hundred million dollars in military aid, and forty million dollars for internal security.

The United States has also given clandestine support to the Siniora government, according to the former senior intelligence official and the U.S. government consultant. "We are in a program to enhance the Sunni capability to resist Shiite influence, and we're spreading the money around as much as we can," the former senior intelligence official said. The problem was that such money "always gets in more pockets than you think it will," he said. "In this process, we're financing a lot of bad guys with some serious potential unintended consequences. We don't have the ability to determine and get pay vouchers signed by the people we like and avoid the people we don't like. It's a very high-risk venture."

American, European, and Arab officials I spoke to told me that the Siniora government and its allies had allowed some aid to end up in the hands of emerging Sunni radical groups in northern Lebanon, the Bekaa Valley, and around Palestinian refugee camps in the south. These groups, though small, are seen as a buffer to Hezbollah; at the same time, their ideological ties are with Al Qaeda.

During a conversation with me, the



"Helen changed our song, and she refuses to hum even a few bars to me."

former Saudi diplomat accused Nasrallah of attempting "to hijack the state," but he also objected to the Lebanese and Saudi sponsorship of Sunni jihadists in Lebanon. "Salafis are sick and hateful, and I'm very much against the idea of flirting with them," he said. "They hate the Shiites, but they hate Americans more. If you try to outsmart them, they will outsmart us. It will be ugly."

Alastair Crooke, who spent nearly thirty years in MI6, the British intelligence service, and now works for Conflicts Forum, a think tank in Beirut, told me, "The Lebanese government is opening space for these people to come in. It could be very dangerous." Crooke said that one Sunni extremist group, Fatah al-Islam, had splintered from its pro-Syrian parent group, Fatah al-Intifada, in the Nahr al-Bared refugee camp, in northern Lebanon. Its membership at the time was less than two hundred. "I was told that within twenty-four hours they were being offered weapons and money by people presenting themselves as representatives of the Lebanese government's interests—presumably to take on Hezbollah," Crooke said.

The largest of the groups, Asbat al-Ansar, is situated in the Ain al-Hilweh Palestinian refugee camp. Asbat al-Ansar has received arms and supplies from Lebanese internal-security forces and militias associated with the Siniora government.

In 2005, according to a report by the U.S.-based International Crisis Group, Saad Hariri, the Sunni majority leader of the Lebanese parliament and the son of the slain former Prime Minister—Saad inherited more than four billion dollars after his father's assassination—paid forty-eight thousand dollars in bail for four members of an Islamic militant group from Dinniyeh. The men had been arrested while trying to establish an Islamic mini-state in northern Lebanon. The Crisis Group noted that many of the militants "had trained in al-Qaeda camps in Afghanistan."

According to the Crisis Group report, Saad Hariri later used his parliamentary majority to obtain amnesty for twenty-two of the Dinniyeh Islamists, as well as for seven militants suspected of plotting to bomb the Italian and Ukrainian embassies in Beirut, the previous year. (He also arranged a pardon for Samir Geagea, a Maronite Christian militia leader, who

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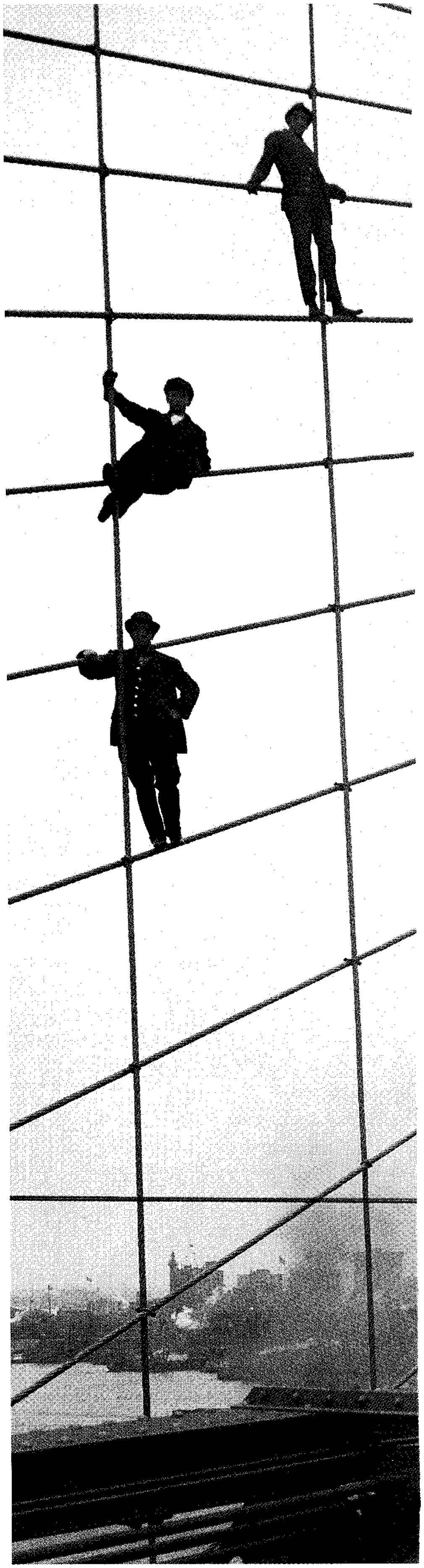
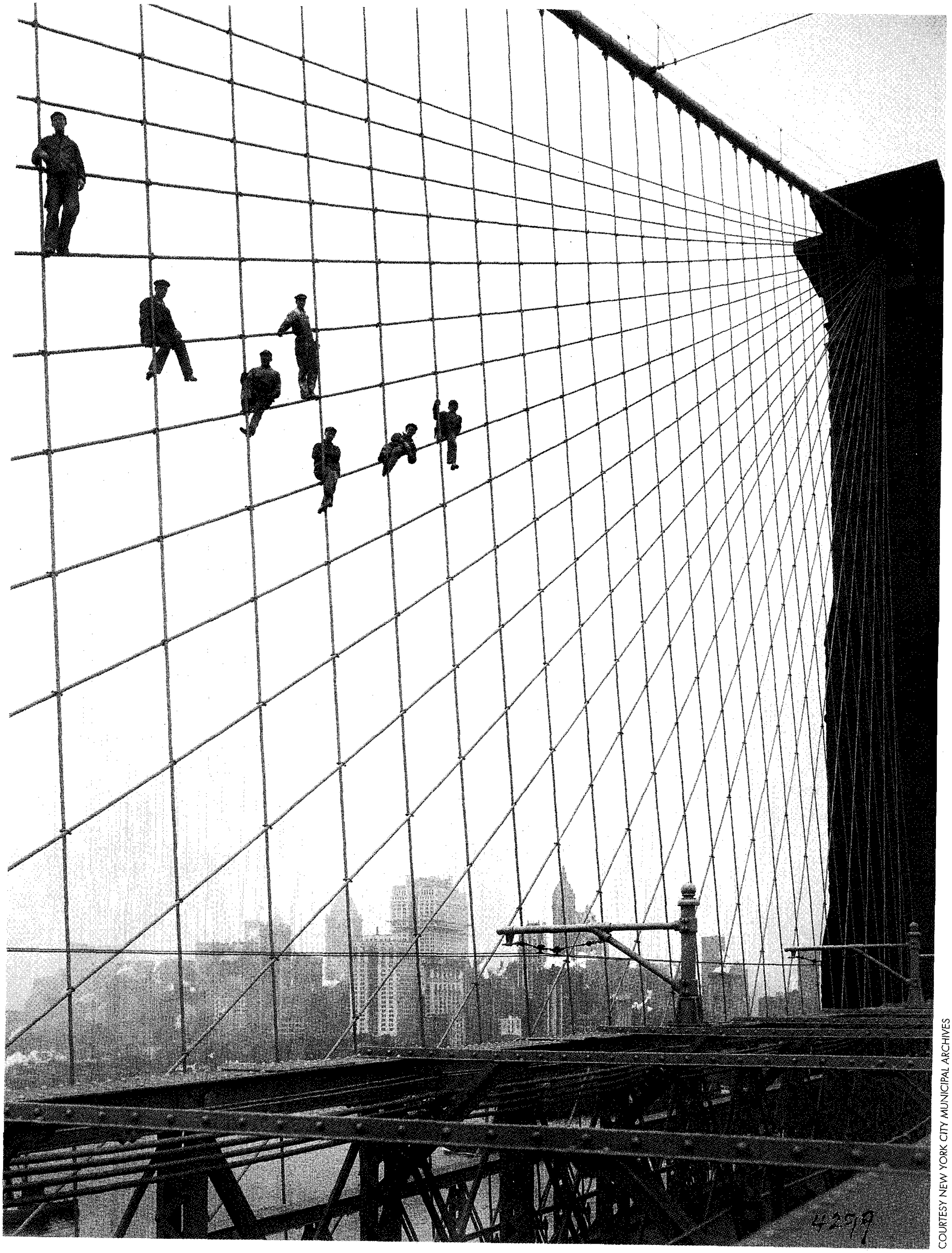
PHOTOGRAPH BY
EUGENE DE SALIGNAC

ABOVE TOWN



No one in my family remembered much about my great-grandfather de Salignac. He was divorced from my great-grandmother soon after 1900, and lived the rest of his life alone, in New York City. My mother had a vague idea that he was a stockbroker; as a child, I never even saw a picture of him. So we were surprised when, a few years ago, we received a call from Michael Lorenzini, of the Municipal Archives of the City of New York. He had been examining a large collection of images—nearly twenty thousand glass negatives and a hundred and thirteen scrapbooks of prints—when he realized that they had all been shot by a single unknown photographer, Eugene de Salignac. De Salignac, it turned out, had worked for the Department of Bridges (later the Department of Plant and Structures) from 1903 to 1934. Vast reaches of infrastructure were laid down in those years, and his job was to provide a record: he shot the construction of the Manhattan and Queensboro Bridges and the Municipal Building; subway tunnels, trolley lines, and ferries. His images have an odd beauty and, at times, a subversive wit. In September, 1914, he took a picture of painters dutifully at work on the Brooklyn Bridge; the department used it in an annual report. Two weeks later, de Salignac returned, and, in what seems like a magnificent gesture of playing hooky, the painters climbed freehand, with no safety equipment in sight, spreading out on the wires as though they were circus performers, or the notes of a jazz riff playing above the skyline. (More photographs are at newyorker.com.) Lorenzini has gathered many of de Salignac's most compelling images in "New York Rises" (Aperture; $40); an accompanying exhibition opens May 4th at the Museum of the City of New York.

—Michelle Preston



COURTESY NEW YORK CITY MUNICIPAL ARCHIVES

"Are you sure you're not confusing manic-depressive with awake-asleep?"

• •

had been convicted of four political murders, including the assassination, in 1987, of Prime Minister Rashid Karami.) Hariri described his actions to reporters as humanitarian.

In an interview in Beirut, a senior official in the Siniora government acknowledged that there were Sunni jihadists operating inside Lebanon. "We have a liberal attitude that allows Al Qaeda types to have a presence here," he said. He related this to concerns that Iran or Syria might decide to turn Lebanon into a "theatre of conflict."

The official said that his government was in a no-win situation. Without a political settlement with Hezbollah, he said, Lebanon could "slide into a conflict," in which Hezbollah fought openly with Sunni forces, with potentially horrific consequences. But if Hezbollah agreed to a settlement yet still maintained a separate army, allied with Iran and Syria, "Lebanon could become a target. In both cases, we become a target."

The Bush Administration has portrayed its support of the Siniora government as an example of the President's belief in democracy, and his desire to prevent other powers from interfering in Lebanon. When Hezbollah led street demonstrations in Beirut in December, John Bolton, who was then the U.S. Ambassador to the U.N., called them "part of the Iran-Syria-inspired coup."

Leslie H. Gelb, a past president of the Council on Foreign Relations, said that the Administration's policy was less pro democracy than "pro American national security. The fact is that it would be terribly dangerous if Hezbollah ran Lebanon." The fall of the Siniora government would be seen, Gelb said, "as a signal in the Middle East of the decline of the United States and the ascendancy of the terrorism threat. And so any change in the distribution of political power in Lebanon has to be opposed by the United States—and we're justified in helping any non-Shiite parties resist that change. We should say this publicly, instead of talking about democracy."

Martin Indyk, of the Saban Center, said, however, that the United States "does not have enough pull to stop the moderates in Lebanon from dealing with the extremists." He added, "The President sees the region as divided between moderates and extremists, but our regional friends see it as divided between Sunnis and Shia. The Sunnis that we view as extremists are regarded by our Sunni allies simply as Sunnis."

In January, after an outburst of street violence in Beirut involving supporters of both the Siniora government and Hezbollah, Prince Bandar flew to Tehran to discuss the political impasse in Lebanon and to meet with Ali Larijani, the Iranians' negotiator on nuclear issues. According to a Middle Eastern ambassador, Bandar's mission—which the ambassador said was endorsed by the White House—also aimed "to create problems between the Iranians and Syria." There had been tensions between the two countries about Syrian talks with Israel, and the Saudis' goal was to encourage a breach. However, the ambassador said, "It did not work. Syria and Iran are not going to betray each other. Bandar's approach is very unlikely to succeed."

Walid Jumblatt, who is the leader of the Druze minority in Lebanon and a strong Siniora supporter, has attacked Nasrallah as an agent of Syria, and has repeatedly told foreign journalists that Hezbollah is under the direct control of the religious leadership in Iran. In a conversation with me last December, he depicted Bashir Assad, the Syrian President, as a "serial killer." Nasrallah, he said, was "morally guilty" of the assassination of Rafik Hariri and the murder, last November, of Pierre Gemayel, a member of the Siniora Cabinet, because of his support for the Syrians.

Jumblatt then told me that he had met with Vice-President Cheney in Washington last fall to discuss, among other issues, the possibility of undermining Assad. He and his colleagues advised Cheney that, if the United States does try to move against Syria, members of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood would be "the ones to talk to," Jumblatt said.

The Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, a branch of a radical Sunni movement founded in Egypt in 1928, engaged in more than a decade of violent opposition to the regime of Hafez Assad, Bashir's father. In 1982, the Brotherhood took control of the city of Hama;

Assad bombarded the city for a week, killing between six thousand and twenty thousand people. Membership in the Brotherhood is punishable by death in Syria. The Brotherhood is also an avowed enemy of the U.S. and of Israel. Nevertheless, Jumblatt said, "We told Cheney that the basic link between Iran and Lebanon is Syria—and to weaken Iran you need to open the door to effective Syrian opposition."

There is evidence that the Administration's redirection strategy has already benefitted the Brotherhood. The Syrian National Salvation Front is a coalition of opposition groups whose principal members are a faction led by Abdul Halim Khaddam, a former Syrian Vice-President who defected in 2005, and the Brotherhood. A former high-ranking C.I.A. officer told me, "The Americans have provided both political and financial support. The Saudis are taking the lead with financial support, but there is American involvement." He said that Khaddam, who now lives in Paris, was getting money from Saudi Arabia, with the knowledge of the White House. (In 2005, a delegation of the Front's members met with officials from the National Security Council, according to press reports.) A former White House official told me that the Saudis had provided members of the Front with travel documents.

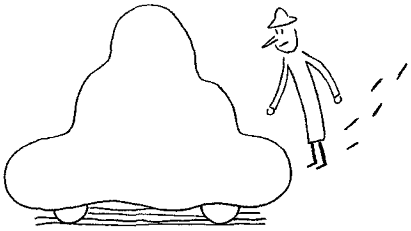
Jumblatt said he understood that the issue was a sensitive one for the White House. "I told Cheney that some people in the Arab world, mainly the Egyptians"—whose moderate Sunni leadership has been fighting the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood for decades—"won't like it if the United States helps the Brotherhood. But if you don't take on Syria we will be face to face in Lebanon with Hezbollah in a long fight, and one we might not win."

THE SHEIKH

On a warm, clear night early last December, in a bombed-out suburb a few miles south of downtown Beirut, I got a preview of how the Administration's new strategy might play out in Lebanon. Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah, the Hezbollah leader, who has been in hiding, had agreed to an interview. Security arrangements for the meeting were secretive and elaborate. I was driven, in the back seat of a darkened car, to a damaged underground garage somewhere in Beirut, searched with a hand-held scanner, placed in a second car to be driven to yet another bomb-scarred underground garage, and transferred again. Last summer, it was reported that Israel was trying to kill Nasrallah, but the extraordinary precautions were not due only to that threat. Nasrallah's aides told me that they believe he is a prime target of fellow-Arabs, primarily Jordanian intelligence operatives, as well as Sunni jihadists who they believe are affiliated with Al Qaeda. (The government consultant and a retired four-star general said that Jordanian intelligence, with support from the U.S. and Israel, had been trying to infiltrate Shiite groups, to work against Hezbollah. Jordan's King Abdullah II has warned that a Shiite government in Iraq that was close to Iran would lead to the emergence of a Shiite crescent.) This is something of an ironic turn: Nasrallah's battle with Israel last summer turned him—a Shiite—into the most popular and influential figure among Sunnis and Shiites throughout the region. In recent months, however, he has increasingly been seen by many Sunnis not as a symbol of Arab unity but as a participant in a sectarian war.

Nasrallah, dressed, as usual, in religious garb, was waiting for me in an unremarkable apartment. One of his advisers said that he was not likely to remain there overnight; he has been on the move since his decision, last July, to order the kidnapping of two Israeli soldiers in a cross-border raid set off the thirty-three-day war. Nasrallah has since said publicly—and repeated to me—that he misjudged the Israeli response. "We just wanted to capture prisoners for exchange purposes," he told me. "We never wanted to drag the region into war."

Nasrallah accused the Bush Administration of working with Israel to deliberately instigate *fitna*, an Arabic word that is used to mean "insurrection and fragmentation within Islam." "In my opinion, there is a huge campaign through the media throughout the world to put each side up against the other," he said. "I believe that all this is being run by American and Israeli intelligence." (He did not provide any specific evidence for this.) He said that the U.S. war in Iraq had increased sectarian tensions, but argued that Hezbollah had tried to prevent them from spreading into Lebanon. (Sunni-Shiite confrontations increased, along with violence, in the weeks after we talked.)



Nasrallah said he believed that President Bush's goal was "the drawing of a new map for the region. They want the partition of Iraq. Iraq is not on the edge of a civil war—there *is* a civil war. There is ethnic and sectarian cleansing. The daily killing and displacement which is taking place in Iraq aims at achieving three Iraqi parts, which will be sectarian and ethnically pure as a prelude to the partition of Iraq. Within one or two years at the most, there will be total Sunni areas, total Shiite areas, and total Kurdish areas. Even in Baghdad, there is a fear that it might be divided into two areas, one Sunni and one Shiite."

He went on, "I can say that President Bush is lying when he says he does not want Iraq to be partitioned. All the facts occurring now on the ground make you swear he is dragging Iraq to partition. And a day will come when he will say, 'I cannot do anything, since the Iraqis want the partition of their country and I honor the wishes of the people of Iraq.' "

Nasrallah said he believed that America also wanted to bring about the partition of Lebanon and of Syria. In Syria, he said, the result would be to push the country "into chaos and internal battles like in Iraq." In Lebanon, "There will be a Sunni state, an Alawi state, a Christian state, and a Druze state." But, he said, "I do not know if there will be a Shiite state." Nasrallah told me that he suspected that one aim of the Israeli bombing of Lebanon last summer was "the destruction of Shiite areas and the displacement of Shiites from Lebanon. The idea was to have the Shiites of Lebanon and Syria flee to southern Iraq," which is dominated by Shiites. "I am not sure, but I smell this," he told me.

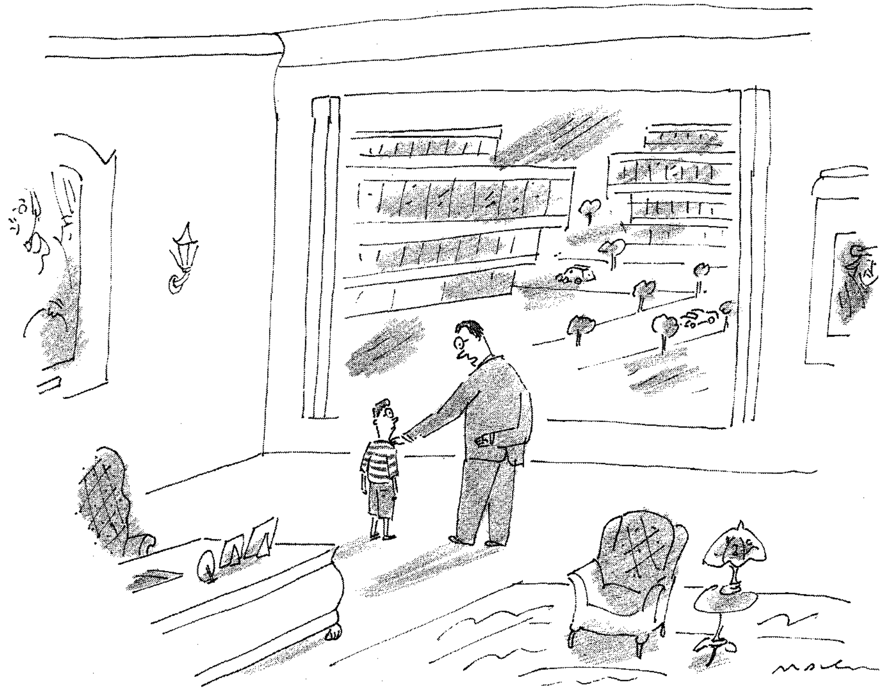
Partition would leave Israel surrounded by "small tranquil states," he said. "I can assure you that the Saudi kingdom will also be divided, and the issue will reach to North African states. There will be small ethnic and confessional states," he said. "In other words, Israel will be the most important and the strongest state in a region that has been partitioned into ethnic and confessional states that are in agreement with each other. This is the new Middle East."

In fact, the Bush Administation has adamantly resisted talk of partitioning Iraq, and its public stances suggest that the White House sees a future Lebanon that is intact, with a weak, disarmed Hezbollah playing, at most, a minor political role. There is also no evidence to support Nasrallah's belief that the Israelis were seeking to drive the Shiites into southern Iraq. Nevertheless, Nasrallah's vision of a larger sectarian conflict in which the United States is implicated suggests a possible consequence of the White House's new strategy.

In the interview, Nasrallah made mollifying gestures and promises that would likely be met with skepticism by his opponents. "If the United States says that discussions with the likes of us can be useful and influential in determining American policy in the region, we have no objection to talks or meetings," he said. "But, if their aim through this meeting is to impose their policy on us, it will be a waste of time." He said that the Hezbollah militia, unless attacked, would operate only within the borders of Lebanon, and pledged to disarm it when the Lebanese Army was able to stand up. Nasrallah said that he had no interest in initiating another war with Israel. However, he added that he was anticipating, and preparing for, another Israeli attack, later this year.

Nasrallah further insisted that the street demonstrations in Beirut would continue until the Siniora government fell or met his coalition's political demands. "Practically speaking, this government cannot rule," he told me. "It might issue orders, but the majority of the Lebanese people will not abide and will not recognize the legitimacy of this government. Siniora remains in office because of international support, but this does not mean that Siniora can rule Lebanon."

President Bush's repeated praise of the Siniora government, Nasrallah said, "is the best service to the Lebanese opposition he can give, because it weakens their position vis-à-vis the Lebanese people and the Arab and Islamic populations. They are betting on us getting tired. We did not get tired during the war, so how could we get tired in a demonstration?"



"Someday, son, all of this will be seized by the government for failure to pay back taxes."

There is sharp division inside and outside the Bush Administration about how best to deal with Nasrallah, and whether he could, in fact, be a partner in a political settlement. The outgoing director of National Intelligence, John Negroponte, in a farewell briefing to the Senate Intelligence Committee, in January, said that Hezbollah "lies at the center of Iran's terrorist strategy. . . . It could decide to conduct attacks against U.S. interests in the event it feels its survival or that of Iran is threatened. . . . Lebanese Hezbollah sees itself as Tehran's partner."

In 2002, Richard Armitage, then the Deputy Secretary of State, called Hezbollah "the A-team" of terrorists. In a recent interview, however, Armitage acknowledged that the issue has become somewhat more complicated. Nasrallah, Armitage told me, has emerged as "a political force of some note, with a political role to play inside Lebanon if he chooses to do so." In terms of public relations and political gamesmanship, Armitage said, Nasrallah "is the smartest man in the Middle East." But, he added, Nasrallah "has got to make it clear that he wants to play an appropriate role as the loyal opposition. For me, there's still a blood debt to pay"—a reference to the murdered colonel and the Marine-barracks bombing.

Robert Baer, a former longtime C.I.A. agent in Lebanon, has been a severe critic of Hezbollah and has warned of its links to Iranian-sponsored terrorism. But now, he told me, "we've got Sunni Arabs preparing for cataclysmic conflict, and we will need somebody to protect the Christians in Lebanon. It used to be the French and the United States who would do it, and now it's going to be Nasrallah and the Shiites.

"The most important story in the Middle East is the growth of Nasrallah from a street guy to a leader—from a terrorist to a statesman," Baer added. "The dog that didn't bark this summer"—during the war with Israel—"is Shiite terrorism." Baer was referring to fears that Nasrallah, in addition to firing rockets into Israel and kidnapping its soldiers, might set in motion a wave of terror attacks on Israeli and American targets around the world. "He could have pulled the trigger, but he did not," Baer said.

Most members of the intelligence and diplomatic communities acknowledge Hezbollah's ongoing ties to Iran. But there is disagreement about the extent to which Nasrallah would put aside Hezbollah's interests in favor of Iran's. A former C.I.A. officer who also served in Lebanon called Nasrallah "a Lebanese phenomenon," adding, "Yes, he's aided by Iran and Syria, but Hezbollah's gone beyond that." He told me that there was a period in the late eighties and early nineties when the C.I.A. station in Beirut was able to clandestinely monitor Nasrallah's conversations. He described Nasrallah as "a gang leader who was able to make deals with the other gangs. He had contacts with everybody."

"This book club isn't fun anymore."

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TELLING CONGRESS

The Bush Administration's reliance on clandestine operations that have not been reported to Congress and its dealings with intermediaries with questionable agendas have recalled, for some in Washington, an earlier chapter in history. Two decades ago, the Reagan Administration attempted to fund the Nicaraguan contras illegally, with the help of secret arms sales to Iran. Saudi money was involved in what became known as the Iran-Contra scandal, and a few of the players back then—notably Prince Bandar and Elliott Abrams—are involved in today's dealings.

Iran-Contra was the subject of an informal "lessons learned" discussion two years ago among veterans of the scandal. Abrams led the discussion. One conclusion was that even though the program was eventually exposed, it had been possible to execute it without telling Congress. As to what the experience taught them, in terms of future covert operations, the participants found: "One, you can't trust our friends. Two, the C.I.A. has got to be totally out of it. Three, you can't trust the uniformed military, and four, it's got to be run out of the Vice-President's office"—a reference to Cheney's role, the former senior intelligence official said.

I was subsequently told by the two government consultants and the former senior intelligence official that the echoes of Iran-Contra were a factor in Negroponte's decision to resign from the National Intelligence directorship and accept a sub-Cabinet position of Deputy Secretary of State. (Negroponte declined to comment.)

The former senior intelligence official also told me that Negroponte did not want a repeat of his experience in the Reagan Administration, when he served as Ambassador to Honduras. "Negroponte said, 'No way. I'm not going down that road again, with the N.S.C. running operations off the books, with no finding.'" (In the case of covert C.I.A. operations, the President must issue a written finding and inform Congress.) Negroponte stayed on as Deputy Secretary of State, he added, because "he believes he can influence the government in a positive way."

The government consultant said that Negroponte shared the White House's policy goals but "wanted to do it by the book." The Pentagon consultant also told me that "there was a sense at the senior-ranks level that he wasn't fully on board with the more adventurous clandestine initiatives." It was also true, he said, that Negroponte "had problems with this Rube Goldberg policy contraption for fixing the Middle East."

The Pentagon consultant added that one difficulty, in terms of oversight, was accounting for covert funds. "There are many, many pots of black money, scattered in many places and used all over the world on a variety of missions," he said. The budgetary chaos in Iraq, where billions of dollars are unaccounted for, has made it a vehicle for such transactions, according to the former senior intelligence official and the retired four-star general.

"This goes back to Iran-Contra," a former National Security Council aide told me. "And much of what they're doing is to keep the agency out of it." He said that Congress was not being briefed on the full extent of the U.S.-Saudi operations. And, he said, "The C.I.A. is asking, 'What's going on?' They're concerned, because they think it's amateur hour."

The issue of oversight is beginning to get more attention from Congress. Last November, the Congressional Research Service issued a report for Congress on what it depicted as the Administration's blurring of the line between C.I.A. activities and strictly military ones, which do not have the same reporting requirements. And the Senate Intelligence Committee, headed by Senator Jay Rockefeller, has scheduled a hearing for March 8th on Defense Department intelligence activities.

Senator Ron Wyden, of Oregon, a Democrat who is a member of the Intelligence Committee, told me, "The Bush Administration has frequently failed to meet its legal obligation to keep the Intelligence Committee fully and currently informed. Time and again, the answer has been 'Trust us.'" Wyden said, "It is hard for me to trust the Administration." ♦

A REPORTER AT LARGE

SPIDER WOMAN

Hunting venomous species in the basements of Los Angeles.

BY BURKHARD BILGER

Early one morning last year, when the streets of downtown Los Angeles were still mostly deserted, a strange figure appeared in the Goodwill store at 235 South Broadway, next door to the Guadalupe Wedding Chapel. She had on tennis shoes, dungarees, and a faded blue T-shirt, and was outfitted as if for a safari or a spelunking expedition. A khaki vest was stuffed with empty plastic vials; a black duffelbag across her shoulders held a pair of high-tech headlamps, a digital camera, and a venom extractor. She made her way to the front desk, past a rack of summer dresses on sale for six dollars and ninety-nine cents. Then she introduced herself to the store manager, Gina Torres, a statuesque woman with silver-blond hair and thickly drawn eyeliner. She said that her name was Greta Binford and she wanted to hunt spiders in the basement.

Torres stared at her. Binford is small and keen-eyed, with a dark-brown bob and a scattering of freckles across her nose. Her voice has a quick, clear, almost chirping quality, and at forty-one she carries herself with the springy assurance of a high-school cheerleader. She didn't look like a crackpot to Torres. Then again, she didn't look like a spider hunter, either. Perhaps she was a health inspector. "I've never heard anything about you," Torres said, her eyes narrowing. "I've been here two years, and I've never seen you before."

Binford explained to Torres that she was a professor of biology at Lewis & Clark College, in Portland, Oregon. She specialized in arachnology and was on a weeklong spider-hunting trip through the Southwest. She'd been to this store before, years ago, to collect an interesting species that lived in the basement. "I just need an hour or so to get a few more specimens," Binford said. What she didn't say was that they were among the deadliest spiders in the world.

They belonged to a South American species called *Loxosceles laeta*—a cousin of the brown recluse, but larger and more venomous. Sometime in the late nineteen-sixties, apparently, their ancestors had ridden to California in costume crates owned by a troupe of Shakespearean actors from Brazil. A year or two later, they were discovered at a theatre in the L.A. suburb of Sierra Madre and promptly triggered a citywide panic. "50 DEADLY SPIDERS FOUND," a front-page headline in the Los Angeles *Times* announced on June 7, 1969. "VENOM LIKE RATTLESNAKE'S." In Sierra Madre, spider suspects were rushed to the police in jam jars, ice-cream boxes, and Styrofoam cups. "Some have shown up around 3 A.M. in the trembling hands of frantic householders," the *Times* reported. By August of that year, more than two hundred *laeta*—as well as a thousand of their molted skins—had been found across Los Angeles. One family of eight abandoned their home at the sight of a single spider.

The Great Spider Hunt of 1969 ended as such scares usually do: attics were cleared, toolsheds swept clean, buildings fumigated and declared safe. Yet the spiders remained. Buildings like the Goodwill store had basements and sub-basements so deep and interconnected that no pesticide could reach into every hiding place. "I showed one of the spiders to an employee the last time I was here," Binford told me. "And she said, 'Yeah, I see those in the bathroom all the time.'" No bites had been reported, but word seemed to have got out that something was not quite right in the basement. Torres told Binford that no one was allowed downstairs, for reasons of liability. "You have to understand," she said. "I have to protect myself."

Binford spent the next hour on her cell phone, pleading her case with Goodwill executives. She was thumbing through a rack of used Hawaiian shirts, awaiting the management's verdict, when an irritated voice blared over the intercom, "Spider lady! Spider lady! Come to the front!" Torres was standing by the cash register, her hands on her hips. She made Binford scrawl out a waiver on a legal pad, then led her down a long, dingy hallway to the basement door. "It's your own risk," she said, pointing down the stairwell. "If I don't hear from you in two days, I call the authorities."

Spiders have a bad reputation, largely undeserved. The great majority aren't venomous enough to harm us, or their fangs are too small, or their jaw muscles are too puny, or they simply see no profit in attacking large, indigestible creatures that can crush them with their toes. Unlike snake venom, which is designed to kill vertebrates, spider venom is almost always meant for insects. Its toxins can stop a hornet in mid-flight, but they lack proper targets in the human nervous system. "If we were wired for spider venoms the way insects are, we would be screwed," Binford says.

Still, some spiders can kill you, and they're the ones that interest Binford. She has spent the past ten years collecting venomous species worldwide, raising them in her lab, and patiently milking their fangs. A single spider can inject its victims with as many as two hundred compounds: proteases that dissolve flesh, gelatinases that dissolve connective tissues, neurotoxins that short-circuit nerves, slow the heart, and freeze the limbs. A spider's venom offers a window onto its evolution, Binford says—a chemical record of its most successful experiments at killing prey. It's also a storehouse of potential pharmaceuticals, one that remains virtually untapped. "There aren't any spiders for which we know all the chemicals in their venom," she says. "None."

In the United States, two groups of spiders are widely considered dangerous: black widows and brown recluses, along with their close relatives. Widows are small creatures, potbellied and delicately

ISTVAN BANYAI

Greta Binford didn't tell the store manager that the spiders downstairs were among the deadliest in the world.

articulated, often with a red or yellow hourglass on the abdomen. They can be found in cellars, garages, and woodpiles in every state, and seem to be fond of filth. (They're notorious for biting the pendulous parts of outhouse visitors.) The recluse and other *Loxosceles* species prefer warm, dry country. They're common in the Southwest and the Midwest but can range as far east as Georgia. In Oklahoma, where I grew up, my mother sometimes found them in our bedsheets—their legs long and nearly translucent, their bodies a pale umber, with a violin-shaped mark on the head. We called them fiddlebacks.

I was never bitten by a fiddleback, but a friend of mine named Jeanne Devlin swallowed a black widow one spring, when it crawled into her juice glass on a Girl Scout trip. It felt like a cocklebur in her throat, she told me recently, and bit her at least once before she coughed it up. Black-widow venom is a cocktail of neurotoxins. It targets the muscles and nerves, causing cramps and spasms, fever, nausea, and wracking pains. One or two people may die from it every few years, most of them elderly or very young, but an antivenom has been available since the nineteen-thirties. Devlin's mother drove her to a local doctor for the injection. The other girls were crying hysterically, convinced that she was going to die, but she went home that night with nothing more than a terrible sore throat.

No one knows how many people in the United States are killed by *Loxosceles* bites—estimates vary from fewer than one a year to as many as ten. The venom triggers an immune reaction that can be hard to distinguish from herpes, cellulitis, flesh-eating staph, and half a dozen other severe infections. (In 2001, two cases of anthrax poisoning in New York were initially blamed on recluses.) Perhaps to keep the toxins from spreading, the body walls off the arteries and veins around the bite. The skin, starved of blood, begins to die, turning black and sloughing off, leaving an open wound that can take months to heal. Bite victims sometimes look as if they've had serious burns. Some go into shock. A rare few suffer hemolysis: their red blood cells begin to burst, poisoning the kidneys and slowly depriving the body of oxygen. Although an antivenom for recluse bites has recently been developed, with Binford's help, it has yet to be approved in the United States.

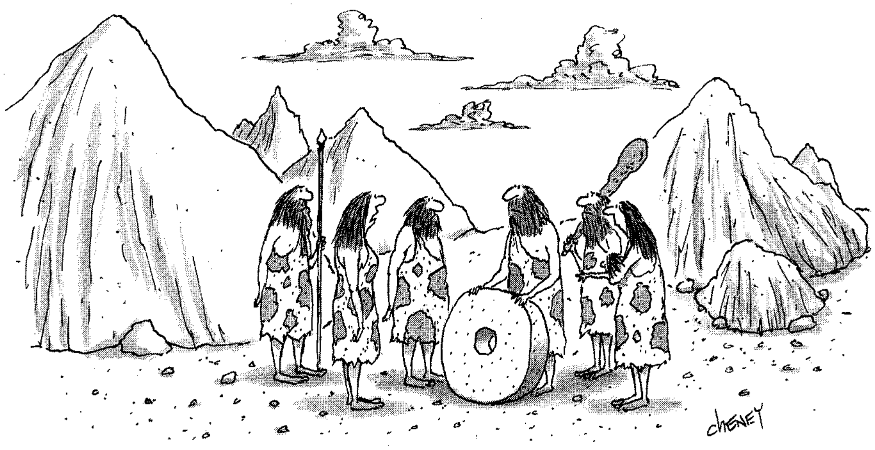
I first met Binford at the American Museum of Natural History, in New York. She was planning her trip through the Southwest to gather fresh venom for her research, and she wanted to spend time in the museum first, studying the species that she hoped to find in the field.

The spiders were kept in slender vials of ethyl alcohol, and arranged in cabinets in a vast, deserted hall. Each vial held one or more specimens and was marked with a typewritten label. One of the spiders, a *Loxosceles rufescens* native to the Mediterranean, had been found in New York in 1992. "116 W. 71st, Apt #3," the label read. "Cynthia Dansby. Put on sweatpants. Bit on thigh."

Binford peered at the specimens through a microscope, focussing on their genitals. (The shape of a spider's sex organs—bulbous or bifurcated, barbed or smooth—is sometimes the only clue to its species.) Then she went to find Louis Sorkin, the assistant to the curator of spiders. Sorkin is usually called in to investigate the city's infestations, and Binford suspected that the museum might have a few trespassers of its own. Spiders often crawl into crates and cabinets and get sent around the world with travelling exhibits, she said. Over the years, she had found *Loxosceles* in the basements of the Argentine Museum of Natural Sciences and the Indiana Statehouse.

Sorkin, a short bald man with bushy eyebrows and a rolling, stumpy gait, handed us a pair of flashlights and took us down a service staircase. As we walked, he told us about the bedbug colony that he was raising in his office, mostly on his own blood—"I like to put them on me and watch them feed"—and about a dinner hosted by the local Explorers Club. The menu included tempura-battered tarantulas, he said, but the cooks had neglected to clean them properly. The spiders' barbed hairs got stuck in some diners' throats, and they had to be taken to the emergency room.

We spent the next hour or so crawling around in the sub-basement, shining our beams among the steam pipes and elevator crankshafts. Sorkin spotted a few cockroaches and recalled a museum scientist who used to capture and tag them, then track their movements around the building. But the most exotic spider we found was a European house spider, *Tegenaria domestica*. We'd have better luck at the Goodwill store in Los Angeles, Binford assured me. "You'll see," she said. "It's just like getting candy in a candy store."



"Nice, but we'll need an environmental-impact study, a warranty, recall bulletins, recycling facilities, and twenty-four-hour customer support."

Spiders tend to be solitary hunters, and they demand the same single-mindedness from scientists. The French entomologist Jean-Henri Fabre set the pattern in the late eighteen-hundreds, when he retired to Provence after a career in chemistry and physics, and spent the rest of his life studying the bugs in his garden. "When we lack the society of our fellow-men," he wrote, "we take refuge in that of animals, without always losing by the change."

Fabre delighted in what he called "experimental villainies." He might catch a bumblebee in a bottle and send it buzzing down a tarantula's den, or steal a female spider's egg sac and replace it with a ball of cork. (She couldn't tell the difference, he found.) He once took two tarantulas, each with a brood of spiderlings on her back, and put them in the same cage to test their territoriality. "One morning, I catch the two harridans fighting out their quarrel on the floor," he later wrote:

> The stronger of the two, the one on top, closes her lethal engine and grinds the head of the prostrate foe. Then she calmly devours the deceased by small mouthfuls.
>
> Now what do the youngsters do, while their mother is being eaten? Easily consoled, heedless of the atrocious scene, they climb on the conqueror's back and quietly take their places among the lawful family. The ogress raises no objection, accepts them as her own. She makes a meal of the mother and adopts the orphans.

Fabre's successors often shared his ghoulish enthusiasms, if not always his scientific rigor. John Crompton was a former mounted policeman in colonial Africa; W. S. Bristowe was an executive in the British chemical industry. Their books, published in the nineteen-forties and fifties, are full of entomological detail but sometimes read like the diaries of ten-year-old boys. Bristowe once ate a spider on a bus to shock his fellow-passengers. He was fascinated by the grim mechanics of spider sex and held gladiatorial combats between species. (His undisputed champion was a small but feisty female ground spider, *Drassodes lapidosus*, which killed fifteen larger opponents in two days.) Crompton licked webs to see how they tasted and daydreamed about which species he would like to be. He envied the crab spider, "whose life consists of immobility interspersed with succulent meals," but settled on a male labyrinth spider, whose mate treats it kindly after copulation. For most species, Crompton noted, a husband's place is "in the digestive tract of his wife."

Time spent in the company of spiders can cure anyone of his sentimentality about nature. In these books, the coöperative ant and the hardworking bee give way to much darker figures: mothers who eat their children, neighbors who prey on neighbors, predators who keep their victims bound and sedated, then slowly drain their body fluids. "Under the tyranny of the stomach, we are all of us, beasts and men alike, ogres," Fabre wrote. "The dignity of labor, the joy of life, maternal affection, the terrors of death: all these do not count, in others; the main point is that the morsel be tender and savory."

Binford came late to the study of spiders, and without morbid predilections. She grew up on a small corn-and-soybean farm in west-central Indiana—"dull spider country," she calls it. Her parents had met at a family reunion, and had local roots so deep and intertwined that Binford jokingly uses herself as an example of inbreeding when she teaches evolutionary biology classes. At her parents' house, though, evolution was never discussed. The Binfords were creationists, and Greta was born again in high school.

As an undergraduate at Purdue, Binford studied veterinary medicine, then switched to psychology after she nearly fainted while watching a dog get an injection. During her sophomore year, she joined a small, charismatic church called Calvary Chapel and soon fell in love with one of its members. When he graduated and took a job near Cincinnati, she spent a summer commuting there on weekends—rolling her hair into the car window so that it would yank her awake if she fell asleep. By that fall, they were married.

Binford played the role of a "Christian conservative housewife" for a couple of years—"I did a lot of cross-stitching. I did a lot of crafts." But she grew restless. In 1987, she enrolled at a branch of Miami University, hoping to become a high-school science teacher. "She didn't have her sights set very high," Ann Rypstra, her genetics professor at the time, told me. "But some students are capable of great things if you nudge them a little, and Greta was nudgeable." One day after class, Rypstra made Binford an offer. She had a grant to study spiders in the Amazon basin of Peru, she said, and wanted Binford to join her as an assistant that summer. Binford dismissed the idea at first, but her husband encouraged her to apply.

The spiders were of a rare, social kind. They gathered in the rain forest by the hundreds of thousands and constructed communal webs, some of which were the length of a tractor-trailer. By describing how the spiders lived and worked together, Rypstra hoped to uncover the roots of all social behavior.

Binford's job was to sit and watch. Every morning, she'd carry a camp stool to the edge of a web and spend the next three hours taking notes. "It was still, still, still," Binford recalls. A troop of monkeys might wander by, or an anteater snuffling for food. There were sloths in the trees, their fur overgrown with emerald moss, and jaguar tracks in the underbrush. Yet the spiders held her attention. Less than half a centimetre long, they worked together like bands of Lilliputians, wrapping up locusts many times their size, patching the web, and caring for one another's children. "Most of what I'd heard about spiders was nasty, evil stuff, and all I saw was really beautiful," Binford says. At the end of the summer, when Binford handed in her notes, Rypstra told her that she was now the world's expert on that species.

"The night I got home, I was just bubbling over," Binford says. "I told my husband that I wanted to change my major, that this stuff was wonderful." But her husband seemed distracted. Later that night, he confessed that he'd fallen in love with another woman. "I kind of got used to you being gone," he said.

When Binford told me this story, at a café across from the Museum of Natural History, she didn't try to blame the disaster on destiny or Providence—she had lost her religious faith in the years following that summer. "My whole platform crumbled," she said. "Until that moment, I'd been on a track of what's expected of a woman in rural Indiana, and it just shattered those expectations." Then she smiled. "It was really the best thing that could have happened to me," she said.

Early in her career, when she was in graduate school at the University of Utah, Binford tried focussing on the milder side of entomology. She had become fascinated with evolution after leaving the Church, and wanted to understand what gave rise to the biodiversity she'd seen in the rain forest. Spider evolution, though, has mostly murderous ends. The forty thousand species identified so far make their homes from the slopes of Mt. Everest to the islands off Antarctica, and nearly everything they do is in quest of fresh meat. Just as birds can be identified by their singing, so spiders can be sorted by their methods of killing.

Spiders begin their hunting with a few

handicaps. They're often smaller and weaker than their prey, and they have no wings to give chase in the air. Some species extend their legs by hydraulic pressure, using the same liquid that carries oxygen from their lungs, so they have a hard time running and breathing at the same time. Even their poison may be no match for their victim's: a crab spider's bite is to a honeybee's sting as "an air-gun compared with an elephant rifle," John Crompton wrote. Yet spiders kill at an astonishing pace. One Dutch researcher estimates that there are some five trillion spiders in the Netherlands alone, each of which consumes about a tenth of a gram of meat a day. Were their victims people instead of insects, they would need only three days to eat all sixteen and a half million Dutchmen.

To compensate for their weaknesses, spiders have evolved an array of weapons, tactics, and freakish mutations that bring to mind a tiny band of supervillains: the X-Men of the animal world. Jumping spiders can leap up to fifty times their own body length; spitting spiders shoot streams of glue to ensnare their prey; orb weavers can spin a silk as strong as steel and a thousand times as elastic. (In 1710, a Frenchman named Bon raised enough spiders to make mittens from their silk; he had to give up the enterprise, though, when all of his workers ate one another.) Some spiders are shape-shifters, camouflaging themselves as dead leaves or bird droppings; others change colors to match the flowers where they're hiding. A spider discovered in the nineteen-eighties, tentatively named *Theridiosoma schwarzeneggeri*, uses its brawny forelegs to stretch its web as taut as a slingshot. When an insect happens by, the spider lets go, and the web snaps forward to capture the victim.

"The thing moves, therefore it is worth catching," Fabre wrote. "This formula seems to sum up the spider's wisdom." Yet the instincts of some species are so elaborately programmed that they can almost pass for intellect. The portia spider hunts other spiders by sneaking onto a high branch and dangling down on them, or pretending to be an insect caught in the web. The bolas spider emits moth pheromones to lure its prey, then whips a line of silk around like a lasso to snag it. The most impressive, though, may be the water spider. It builds a web beneath the waves, anchored to a plant, and fills it with bubbles that it collects on the surface. The bubbles coalesce into an airy chamber where the spider can sit, safe from predators. When hunger strikes, the water spider waits for a shrimp or a tadpole to swim by, then it pounces.

PHONE BOOTH

There should be more nouns
For objects put to sleep
Against their will
The "booth" for instance
With coiled hidden wires
Lidded chrome drawers
Tipping up like lizards' eyes
We looked out into rhymed rain
We heard varying vowels
Rimbaud's vowels with colors
Orange or blue beeps
Types of ancient punctuation
The interpunct between words
A call became twenty-five cents
Times in a marriage we went there
To complain or flirt
A few decades and we wised up
Got used to the shadow
The phone booth as reliquary
An arm could rest
On the triangular shelf
A briefcase between the feet
A pen poked into acoustic holes
While we gathered our actions/wits
For magic and pain
The destiny twins
Some of us scratched pale glyphs
Onto the glass door while talking

Venom is a spider's oldest weapon, and its most mysterious. Like silk, it can be found in almost every species and was probably present in their earliest ancestors: the first spiders already had fangs. Until recently, though, it was impossible to say how venoms differed. Pure samples were hard to obtain; chemists didn't know how to isolate their components, and medical reports were contradictory. "Thus we read of a man bitten by a spider without any effect," Crompton wrote, "whilst his sister bitten by the same spider had a painful swelling that lasted several hours."

The most notorious spider in Europe in Fabre's time was the Italian tarantula, *Lycosa tarantula*. Named for the town of Taranto, on the southern coast, this was a large, fearsome-looking wolf spider—no relation to American tarantulas—whose bite was said to cause madness, melancholy, and death. A victim's only hope was to dance furiously for days on end, often accompanied by fiddles and pipes, until his body gave out and the venom wore off. Liszt, Chopin, and Mendelssohn later wrote music for stylized versions of these dances, which came to be known as tarantellas.

"Must we take these queer things seriously or laugh at them?" Fabre wondered. The answer could be gleaned only from a living subject. So Fabre took a black-bellied tarantula—a cousin of the Italian kind—and had it bite the leg of a young sparrow. Then he took notes:

> A drop of blood flows; the wounded spot is surrounded by a reddish circle, changing to purple. The bird almost immediately loses the use of its leg, which drags, with the toes doubled in; it hops upon the other. Apart from this, the patient does not seem to trouble much about his hurt; his appetite is good. My daugh-

One day we started to race past
And others started racing
Holding phones to their ears
Holding a personal string
To their lips
If there are overages
There might be nouns for
The clotting of numbers in the sky
So thick the stars can't shine through
A word for backing away
From those who shout to their strings
In the airport while eating
We loved the half-booths
Could cup one hand on the mouthpiece
Lean two-thirds out to talk to a friend
Sitting in the lobby
The universe grows
We are dizzy as mercury
We are solitudes aided by awe
Let us mourn secrets told to
Fake wood and the trapezoidal seat
Perfume in the mouthpiece
Like a little Grecian sash
Why did we live so fast
The booth hid our ankles
We twisted the rigid cord
As we spoke
It made a kind of whorl

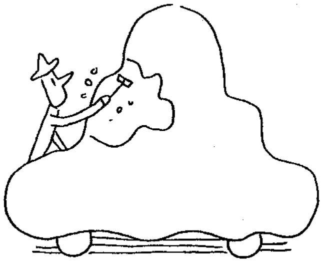
—*Brenda Hillman*

> ters feed him on flies, breadcrumbs, apricot pulp. He is sure to get well, he will recover his strength; the poor victim of the curiosity of science will be restored to liberty. . . . Twelve hours later, the hope of a cure increases; the invalid takes nourishment readily; he clamors for it, if we keep him waiting. But the leg still drags. I set this down to a temporary paralysis which will soon disappear. Two days after, he refuses his food. Wrapping himself in his stoicism and his rumpled feathers, the sparrow hunches into a ball, now motionless, now twitching. My girls take him in the hollow of their hands and warm him with their breath. The spasms become more frequent. A gasp proclaims that all is over. The bird is dead.

The night of the sparrow's death, there was "a certain coolness" among his family at the dinner table, Fabre noted, and an "unspoken accusation of cruelty" in their faces. Nevertheless, he added, "I had the courage to start afresh, this time on a mole." Thirty-six hours later, it, too, lay dead. "It appears to me that the bite of this spider is not an accident which man can afford to treat lightly," Fabre concluded. "This is all that I have to say to the doctors."

And yet, in hindsight, Fabre didn't go far enough. Just because a spider's bite can harm a mole doesn't mean that it will harm a human. Recluse venom can kill rabbits, for instance, but it has no effect on rats. To truly settle the toxicity debate, researchers needed human subjects. And who better than themselves?

Entomologists are somewhat accustomed to being research subjects. Justin Schmidt, a scientist in Tucson, has been attacked by more than seventy-five species of ants and bees, and has put together an index to rank the pain. It runs from sweat bees ("1.0. A tiny spark has singed a single hair on your arm") to bullhorn acacia ants ("1.8. Someone has fired a staple into your cheek") to bullet ants ("4.0+. Like walking over flaming charcoal with a three-inch nail in your heel"). Spiders, though, are less willing collaborators. "One can ill-treat and tease them for hours on end," Crompton grumbled. "But the peevish creatures will *not* bite." Some researchers have removed venom glands and injected themselves with the contents; others have swallowed venom-filled sugar pills. A few, like the Smithsonian's curator of arachnids, Jonathan Coddington, have managed to provoke spiders to bite them, but the results have almost always been anticlimactic. "It feels like picking up a pin, dipping it in vinegar, and then whirling it around in an open cut," Coddington told me. "It's no big deal." The Italian tarantula is no exception: its venom leaves a touch of swelling which fades within a day or two. No frenzied dancing required.



By the beginning of the last century, most arachnologists agreed that there were no truly dangerous spiders in the United States. Then, in 1922, William Baerg, an entomologist at the University of Arkansas, coaxed a black widow to bite him on the finger. Baerg let the spider sink its fangs in for a full five seconds, then kept a diary of his reactions:

> July 10, 8:25 AM: When spider is removed, the pain keeps on growing, a sharp piercing sensation.
>
> 12:20 PM: Pain in hips rather severe. Chest feels cramped, breathing and speech are spasmodic.
>
> 4:30: Nervous tremor, present since noon, is more noticeable now.
>
> 5:15: Arrived at the hospital.
>
> July 11, 6:00 AM: Pain in legs and hips very severe.
>
> July 12, 5:50 AM: Slept for short periods, much troubled with delirium. As soon as I fell asleep, I would be frantically and in an utterly aimless fashion working with spiders.

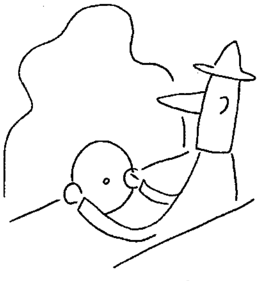
Altogether, Baerg spent three days in the hospital, and needed a week to recover fully. As proof of the spider's toxicity, he later wrote in *The Journal of Parasitology*, the results were "all that could be desired."

Baerg's experiment was much on my mind that morning at the Goodwill store. The *Loxosceles laeta* in the basement weren't recognized as dangerous until 1937, and recluses were considered harmless until the late nineteen-fifties. These days, though, pictures of horrific

Loxosceles bites are easy to find: ulcerating ankles; forearms stripped of flesh; pale, ragged wounds ringed with blackened cells. Binford had never been bitten by a *Loxosceles*, but she didn't take any chances: she wore gloves when collecting and watched where she put her hands. "This is where we most need headlamps," she said, strapping hers on. Then she scurried downstairs, looking for a second as if she had multiple eyes.

The key to good hunting, Binford said, was to have a "search image" in mind. Wolf spiders, for instance, can be found by their eye shine. When you train a flashlight beam over your back yard at night and see a faint glimmering in the grass, those might be spiders gazing back at you. *Loxosceles* tend to splay their legs like asterisks, and to gather in pockets of dampness—anything from the bottoms of rotting logs to the spaces behind steam pipes. "It reminds me of hunting for morels as a kid," Binford said. "There's a kind of Zen moment where everything falls away and there's just you and the spider."

The stairs led down to a long, open space, with pipes and wires hung low from the ceiling. Bits of graffiti flared into view, as our headlamps swung past, and strands of webbing caught at our faces. Most of it belonged to pholcids, or daddy longlegs, Binford assured me. Their venom is strong enough to kill a mouse, and they prey on other spiders, but their fangs are too small to hurt us. She played her beam along the bottom of a wall and held it on a *Steatoda*, a bulbous relative of the black widow, famous among arachnologists for turning radioactive and biting Peter Parker in the recent Spider-Man film. Then she stopped and scanned the room from end to end. "It's like an Easter-egg hunt," she said. The spiders were hiding in plain view.



There, on the wall: two *Loxosceles laeta* scuttling out of the light. And there, on the staircase: a fat female surrounded by four of her moltings. And there, beside an empty whiskey bottle: an adolescent male in its web. Suddenly, spiders seemed to be everywhere—crawling on walls and clinging to the ceiling, suspended from pipes and crouched behind beams. I lost Binford at one point and called out her name in the dark, my voice as warbly as a ghost's. When I found her again, she was corralling a female *laeta* into a vial, along with its cottony egg sac. The spider looked twice as large as the recluses I remembered, but with the same sandy coloring. "It's just too easy," Binford said, snapping the lid shut.

Back at her lab, Binford could tease apart the spiders' toxins, using a host of chemical techniques developed in the past few decades, then sequence the genes for the most harmful compounds. By comparing sequences among species, she could piece together a *Loxosceles* family tree and so lay the groundwork for future treatments. "If you're camping in Peru and you're bitten by something and you have a little antivenom in your pocket, will it work?" she said. "It's fundamentally an evolutionary question." She crouched down and plucked another pregnant female from its web. "It's surprising to me how few of us study spider venom," she said. "It's just so cool."

Half an hour later, Binford had thirty live spiders in her vest. She had wondered, earlier that morning, if the Goodwill store's *Loxosceles* might be gone—if the city exterminators had finally done their jobs. Now she worried that the spider population might be a little too healthy. She pointed to a patch of rubble with a glimmer of daylight coming through it—we could hear the low rumbling of trucks outside—then to cracks and gaps in the other walls. "All these buildings are connected," she said. "And, meanwhile, there are piles of clothes being sorted upstairs that go out all over the city. This could be the beachhead of *Loxosceles laeta* in Los Angeles."

When Binford milks *laeta* in her lab, their fangs yield about ten times as much venom as other *Loxosceles*', and medical records suggest that their bites leave larger lesions. Yet, even if the Goodwill's population spread across Los Angeles, it isn't clear how much of a threat these spiders would pose. *Laeta* are easily as reclusive as their North American cousins. They keep to dark, quiet areas and shrink from human contact. When they do bite, the venom doesn't always have an effect: some people's immune systems aren't sensitive to *Loxosceles* toxins. Five years ago in Lenexa, Kansas, a family of four trapped and killed more than two thousand recluses in their nineteenth-century farmhouse. Yet no one in the family suffered from a bite.

Venom experts get uneasy when asked about the risk of *Loxosceles* bites. The statistics are suspect, they say. "We have several thousand bites a year coded in our database," Leslie Boyer, the medical director of the Arizona Poison Center, in Tucson—perhaps the spider-bite capital of the United States—told me. "I don't know which is the bigger number: those that are coded as bites but aren't, or those that aren't but are."

In Los Angeles, officially speaking, there have been no *Loxosceles laeta* bites in fifty years. But when I talked to Sean Bush, a professor of emergency medicine at Loma Linda University Medical Center (one of the area's leading venom centers), he told me that people come in complaining of spider bites almost every day. Many have necrotic lesions, and the number of lesions has been rising. "They really do look like spider bites," Bush said, but he thought that most were probably caused by antibiotic-resistant staph. The danger of *Loxosceles* bites is "grossly overrated," he said. In any case, he added, as long as no antivenom is available, the diagnosis is moot. "What we do is treat the wounds."

For the past four years, a Mexican company called Bioclon has been working on an antivenom based partly on Binford's research. Of the eighty-odd *Loxosceles* species in the Americas, all those which have been tested cause lesions with a single type of toxin, called sphingomyelinase D. The toxin varies slightly from species to species, Binford has found, but the same few antibodies ought to be able to neutralize any bite. To produce them, Bioclon has cloned four versions of the toxin, immunized horses with them, then harvested the antibodies from the horses' blood. Last fall, the company began testing its antivenom in a hospital in Mexico City. In most cases, Jorge Paniagua-Solís, Bioclon's research director, told me, the pain fades immediately and the lesions begin to heal within a day.

Even so, the antivenom may not be approved in the United States for several years: the demand is too low, and the cost of clinical trials too high. In the mean-time, the best remedy for an infestation is still an exterminator. Spiders have many fine qualities, not the least of which is an ability to hold their venom in abeyance. Their bites are almost never meant for us, but it's best not to tempt them. "If you ask me," the Smithsonian's Jonathan Coddington said, "I'd nuke that Goodwill building."

MARRIAGE COUNSELLOR
MANKOFF

"True, you have irreconcilable differences, but they're mainly about flossing."

• •

Late one night, toward the end of our trip, Binford and I pulled into Yarnell, Arizona, a former mining town in the high country northwest of Phoenix. Binford had a friend and mentor there named Chuck Kristensen, who had taught her how to milk venom years ago. He lived in a pink stucco house near the center of town, with his wife and their teen-age daughter, two curly-haired mutts, and fifty thousand spiders, half of them black widows. He called the place the Spider Pharm.

The Pharm was a final twist on humanity's old ambivalence toward spiders—an attempt to find the virtues in venom. Kristensen had come up with the idea in the late nineteen-seventies, while studying for his master's degree in chemistry at California State University at Long Beach. Drug companies had a long history of prospecting for chemicals in the rain forest, but venom struck Kristensen as a more promising source. Its toxins were already targeted at cells and nerve receptors, and prepackaged for injection with stabilizers and emulsifiers. The problem was getting a sufficient supply. Sitting in a Big Boy restaurant one morning, Kristensen sketched a design for a spider-milking machine—the first of its kind—then began to collect and breed dozens of species for their venom. "I didn't give a shit if they were killing people," he told me. "All I cared about was what was in them."

Kristensen is fifty-six years old now, small and rangy, with scraggly sideburns and dishevelled gray hair. While his wife, Anita—a handsome Czech woman with auburn hair—made coffee and sliced up some oranges, he showed us around the house. This was the Pharm's seventh location, he said. At the last place, in Feasterville, Pennsylvania, the township manager had shown up with a policeman one day and given them ten days to "vacate the spiders." Kristensen kept the smaller species in plastic cups covered in chiffon and stacked in six-foot metal racks. The tarantulas were in larger containers and had their own, steamier room. A few spiders escaped every so often, he said, but most of them were eaten by the daddy longlegs that patrolled the halls.

After the tour, Kristensen brought in a tub of homegrown maggots for the spiders—the babies had to be fed every day, the adults once a week—and Anita milked a few recluses. First, she tranquillized the spiders with carbon-dioxide gas (it lowered their oxygen levels until they passed out), then she grasped one with a pair of tweezers, held it under a microscope, and stepped on a foot switch. The tweezers were wired to an electrical stimulator. When Anita's foot hit the switch, the spider received a small shock, which made its venom gland contract. This forced a droplet through the fangs, where Anita caught it in a thin glass tube.

"I never touched a spider in my life before I met Chuck," she said, as a pair of fangs ballooned into view under the microscope. "But I liked it right away. It never gets boring." On a good day, Anita might milk a thousand spiders and get less than a thimbleful of venom. Yet medical biologists had found a remarkable range of compounds in it over the years—from a Chilean-tarantula toxin that stops heart fibrillations to a Chinese-tarantula toxin that prompts insulin secretions. None had yet been turned into a drug, but a painkiller based on cone-snail venom has been on the market since 2004. Known as Prialt, it's considerably more powerful than morphine.

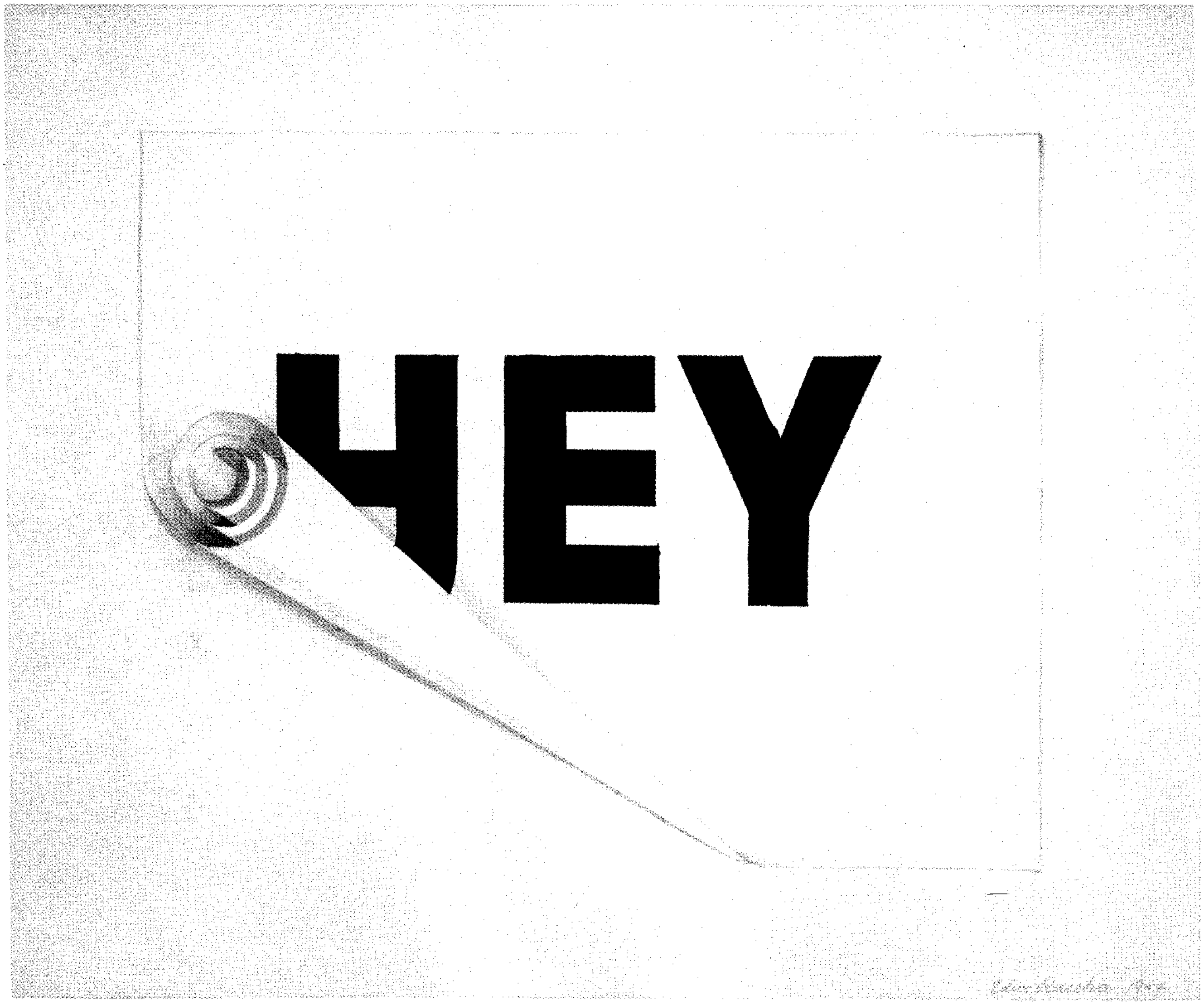
Binford looked around, grinning, entirely at home. Then she ran out to the car to get the cooler full of spiders that she'd collected. She seemed proud and a little nervous showing them off, like a kid with some brand-new Hot Wheels. She was especially excited about those she'd found earlier that day, in a desert reserve outside Palm Springs. They looked like *Loxosceles martha*, she said, the last of the North American species she had left to find. Kristensen held one up to the light. He peered at its appendages and noted its fine orange color, and soon they were chatting companionably about genitalia.

It was well past midnight before we left. Chuck packed up a few spiders for Binford to take home, and Anita found some keepsakes for my children: a brown recluse and a pair of black-widow venom glands, preserved in gel. They'd been handing them out at local schools, she said, but some people just have a thing against spiders. As we drove off, I looked back at the two of them, waving goodbye under the porch light, and thought of Jean-Henri Fabre in his meadow. "To appoint oneself, in this way, an inspector of spiders' webs for many years in succession, and for long seasons, means joining a not overcrowded profession," he wrote. "No matter: the meditative mind returns from that school fully satisfied." ♦

FICTION

HISTORY OF A DISTURBANCE

BY STEVEN MILLHAUSER



You are angry, Elena. You are furious. You are desperately unhappy. Do you know you're becoming bitter?—bitter as those little berries you bit into, remember? in the woods that time. You are frightened. You are resentful. My vow must have seemed to you extremely cruel, or insane. You are suspicious. You are tired. I've never seen you so tired. And of course: you are patient. You're very patient, Elena. I can feel that patience of yours come rolling out at me from every ripple of your unforgiving hair, from your fierce wrists and tense blouse. It's a harsh patience, an aggressive patience. It wants something, as all patience does. What it wants is an explanation, which you feel will free you in some way—if only from the grip of your ferocious waiting. But an explanation is just what's not possible, not now and not ever. What I can give you is only this. Call it an explanation if you like. For me it's a stammer—a shout in the dark.

Do things have beginnings, do you think? Or is a beginning only the first revelation of something that's always been there, waiting to be found? I'm thinking of that little outing we took last summer, the one up to Sandy Point. I'd been working hard, maybe too hard, I had just finished that market-penetration study for Sherwood Merrick Associates, it was the right time to get away. You packed a picnic. You were humming in the kitchen. You were wearing those jeans I like, the ones with the left back pocket torn off, and the top of your bathing suit. I watched as you sliced a sandwich exactly in half. The sun struck your hands. Across your glowing fingers I could see the faint liquidy green cast by the little glass swan on the windowsill. It occurred to me that we rarely took these trips anymore, that we ought to do it more often.

Then we were off, you in that swooping straw hat with its touch of forties glamour, I in that floppy thing that makes me look like a demented explorer. An hour later and there was the country store, with the one red gas pump in front, there was the turn. We passed the summer cottages in the pines. The little parking lot at the end of the road was only half full. Over the stone wall we looked down at the stretch of sand by the lake. We went down the rickety steps, I with the thermos and picnic basket, you with the blanket and towels. Other couples lay in the sun. Some kids were splashing in the water, which rippled from a passing speedboat that made the white barrels rise and fall. The tall lifeguard stand threw a short shadow. Across the lake was a pier, where some boys were fishing. You spread the blanket, took off your hat, shook out your hair. You sat down and began stroking your arm with sunblock. I was sitting next to you, taking it all in, the brown-green water, the wet ropes between the white barrels, the gleam of the lotion on your arm. Everything was bright and clear, and I wondered when the last time was that I'd really looked at anything. Suddenly you stopped what you were doing. You glanced around at the beach, raised your face to the sky, and said, "What a wonderful day!" I turned and looked out at the water.

But I wasn't looking at the water. I was thinking of what you had just said. It was a cry of contentment, a simple expression of delight, the sort of thing anyone might say, on such a day. But I had felt a little sharp burst of irritation. My irritation shocked me. But there it was. I'd been taking in the day, just like you, happy in all my senses. Then you said, "What a wonderful day!" and the day was less wonderful. The day—it's really indecent to speak of these things! But it's as if the day were composed of many separate and diverse presences—that bottle of soda tilted in the sand, that piece of blue-violet sky between the two dark pines, your green hand by the window—which suddenly were blurred together by your words. I felt that something vast and rich had been diminished somehow. I barely knew what you were talking about. I knew of course what you were talking about. But the words annoyed me. I wished you hadn't spoken them. Something uncapturable in the day had been harmed by speech. All at once my irritation passed. The day, which had been banished, came streaming back. Spots of yellow-white sun trembled in brown tree-shadows on the lake-edge. A little girl shouted in the water. I touched your hand.

Was that the beginning? Was it the first sign of a disturbance that had been growing secretly? Two weeks later the Polinzanos had that barbecue. I'd been working hard, harder than usual, putting together a report for Warren and Greene, the one on consumer perception of container shapes for sports beverages. I had all the survey results but I was having trouble writing it up, something was off, I was happy to let it go for an evening. Ralph was in high spirits, flipping over the chicken breasts, pushing down tenderly on the steaks. He waved the spatula about in grand style as he talked real estate. That new three-story monster-house on the block, could you believe two mil, those show-off window arches and did you get a load of that corny balcony, all of it throwing the neighborhood out of whack, a crazy eyesore, but hey, it was driving property values up, he could live with that. Later, in the near-dark, we sat on the screened porch watching the fireflies. From inside the house came voices, laughter. Someone walked slowly across the dark lawn. You were lying in the chaise. I was sitting in that creaky wicker armchair right next to you. Someone stood up from the glider and went into the kitchen. We were alone on the porch. Voices in the house, the shrill cries of crickets, two glasses of wine on the wicker table, moths bumping against the screens. I was in good spirits, relaxed, barely conscious of that report at the edge of my mind. You turned slowly to me. I remember the lazy roll of your head, your cheek against the vinyl strips, your hair flattened on one side, your eyelids sleepy. You said, "Do you love me?" Your voice was flirtatious, easy—you weren't asking me to put a doubt to rest. I smiled, opened my mouth to answer, and for some reason recalled the afternoon at Sandy Point. And again I felt that burst of irritation, as if words were interposing themselves between me and the summer night. I said nothing. The silence began to swell. I could feel it pressing against both of us, like some big rubbery thing. I saw your eyes, still sleepy, begin to grow alert with confusion. And as if I were waking from a trance, I pushed away the silence, I beat it down with a yes yes yes, of course of course. You put your hand on my arm. All was well.

All was not well. In bed I lay awake, thinking of my irritation, thinking of

ED RUSCHA, "HEY WITH CURLED EDGE" (1964)/GAGOSIAN GALLERY/MUSEUM OF MODERN ART/SCALA/ART RESOURCE

the silence, which had been, I now thought, not like some big swelling rubbery thing but like a piece of sharp metal caught in my throat. What was wrong with me? Did I love you? Of course I loved you. But to ask me just then, as I was taking in the night . . . Besides, what did the words mean? Oh, I understood them well enough, those drowsy tender words. They meant, Look, it's a summer night, look, the lawn is dark but there's still a little light left in the sky; they meant you wanted to hear my voice, to hear yourself ask a question that would bring you my voice—it was hardly a question at all, rather a sort of touch, rising out of the night, out of the sounds in the house, the flash of the fireflies. But you said, "Do you love me?," which seemed to require me to understand those words and no others, to think what they might exactly mean. Because they might have meant, Do you still love me as much as you once did even though I know you do, or Isn't it wonderful to sit here and whisper together like teen-agers on the dark porch, while people are in the bright living room, talking and laughing, or Do you feel this rush of tender feeling which is rising in me, as I sit here, on this porch, at night, in summer, at the Polinzanos' barbecue, or Do you love everything I am and do, or only some things, and if so, which ones; and it seemed to me that that single word, "love," was trying to compress within itself a multitude of meanings, was trying to take many precise and separate feelings and crush them into a single mushy mass, which I was being asked to hold in my hands like a big sticky ball.

Do you see what was happening? Do you see what I'm trying to say?

Despite these warnings, I hadn't yet understood. I didn't, at this stage, see the connection between the afternoon at Sandy Point, the night at the Polinzanos' barbecue, and the report that was giving me so much trouble. I knew something was wrong, a little wrong, but I thought I'd been working too hard, I needed to relax a little, or maybe—I tried to imagine it—maybe the trouble was with us, with our marriage, a marriage problem. I don't know when I began to suspect it was more dangerous than that.

Not long after the Polinzanos' barbecue I found myself at the supermarket, picking up a few things for the weekend. You know how I love supermarkets. It excites me to walk down those big American avenues piled high with the world's goods, as if the spoils of six continents are being offered to me in the aftermath of a triumphant war. At the same time I enjoy taking note of brand-name readability, shelf positioning, the attention-drawing power of competing package designs. I was in a buoyant mood. My work had gone well that day, pretty well. I wheeled my cart into the checkout line, set out my bags and boxes on the rubber belt, swiped my card. The girl worked her scanner and touch screen, and I watched with pleasure as the product names appeared sharply on the new LCD monitor facing me above her shoulder. Only two years ago I'd designed a questionnaire on consumer attitudes toward point-of-sale systems in supermarket chains. I signed my slip and handed it to the girl. She smiled at me and said, "Have a good day."

Instantly my mood changed. This time it wasn't irritation that seized me but a kind of nervousness. What was she trying to say to me? I realized that this thought was absurd. At the same time I stared at the girl, trying to grasp her meaning. Have a good day! What were the words trying to say? At the word "have" her front teeth had pressed into her lip: a big overbite. She looked at me. Have a good day! Good day! Have! "What do you—" I said, and abruptly stopped. Things became very still. I saw two tiny silver rings at the top of her ear, one ring slightly larger than the other. I saw the black plastic edge of the credit-card terminal, a finger with purple nail polish, a long strip of paper with a red stripe running along each border. These elements seemed independent of one another. Somewhere a cash tray slid open, coins clanked. Then the finger joined the girl, the tray banged shut, I was standing by my shopping cart, studying the mesh pattern of the collapsible wire basket, trying to recall what was already slipping away. "You too," I said, as I always do, and fled with my cart.

At dinner that evening I felt uneasy, as if I were concealing a secret. Once or twice I thought you were looking at me strangely. I studied the saltshaker, which looked pretty much the way it had always looked, but with, I thought, some slight change I couldn't account for. In the middle of the night I woke suddenly and thought, Something is happening to me, things will never be the same. Then I felt, across the lower part of my stomach, a first faint ripple of fear.

In the course of the next few days I began listening with close attention to whatever was said to me. I listened to each part of what was said, and I listened to the individual words that composed each part. Words! Had I ever listened to them before? Words like crackles of cellophane, words like sluggish fat flies buzzing on sunny windowsills. The simplest remark began to seem suspect, a riddle—not devoid of meaning, but with a vague haze of meaning that grew hazier as I tried to clutch it. "Not on your life." "You bet!" "I guess so." I would be moving smoothly through my day when suddenly I'd come up against one of them, a word-snag, an obstacle in my path. A group of words would detach themselves from speech and stand at mock attention, sticking out their chests, as if to say, Here we are! Who are you? It was as if some space had opened up, a little rift, between words and whatever they were supposed to be doing. I stumbled in that space, I fell.

At the office I was still having difficulties with my report. The words I had always used had a new sheen of strangeness to them. I found it necessary to interrogate them, to investigate their intentions.

Sometimes they were slippery, like fistfuls of tiny silvery fish. Sometimes they took on a mineral hardness, as if they'd become things in themselves, but strange things, like growths of coral.

I don't mean to exaggerate. I knew what words meant, more or less. A cup was a cup, a window a window. That much was clear. Was that much clear? There began to be moments of hesitation, fractions of a second when the thing I was looking at refused to accept any language. Or rather, between the thing and the word a question had appeared, a slight pause, a rupture.

I recall one evening, it must have been a few weeks later, when I stepped from the darkened dining room into the brightly lit kitchen. I saw a whitish thing on the white kitchen table. In that instant the whitishness on the white table was mysterious, ungraspable. It seemed to spill onto the table like a fluid. I felt a rush of fear. A moment later everything changed. I recognized a cup, a simple white cup. The word pressed it into shape, severed it—as if with the blow of an axe—from everything that surrounded it. There it was: a cup. I wondered what it was I'd seen before the word tightened about it.

I said to myself, "You've been working too hard. Your brain is tired. You are not able to concentrate your attention. The words you are using appear to be the same words you have always used, but they've changed in some way, a way you cannot grasp. When this report is done, you are going to take a vacation. That will be good."

I imagined myself in a clean hotel, high up, on the side of a mountain. I imagined myself alone.

I think it was at this period that my own talk began to upset me. The words I uttered seemed like false smiles I was displaying at a party I'd gone to against my will. Sometimes I would overhear myself in the act of speech, like a man who suddenly sees himself in a mirror. Then I grew afraid.

I began to speak less. At the office, where I'd established a long habit of friendliness, I stayed stubbornly at my desk, staring at my screen and limiting myself to the briefest of exchanges, which themselves were not difficult to replace with gestures—a nod, a wave, a smile, a shrug. It's surprising how little you need to say, really. Besides, everyone knew I was killing myself over that report. At home I greeted you silently. I said almost nothing at dinner and immediately shut myself up in my study. You hated my silence. For you it was a knife-blade aimed at your neck. You were the victim and I was the murderer. That was the silent understanding we came to, quite early. And of course I didn't murder you just once, I murdered you every day. I understood this. I struggled to be—well, noisier, for your sake. The words I heard emerging from my mouth sounded like imitations of human speech. "Yes, it's hot, but not too hot," I said. "I think that what she probably meant was that she . . ." The fatal fissure was there. On one side, the gush of language. On the other—what? I looked about. The world rushed away on all sides. If only one could be silent! In my study I avoided my irritating desk with its neat binders containing bar charts and statistical tables and sat motionless in the leather chair, looking out the window at the leaves of hydrangea bushes. I felt tremendously tired, but also alert. Not to speak, not to form words, not to think, not to smear the world with sentences—it was like the release of a band of metal tightening around my skull.

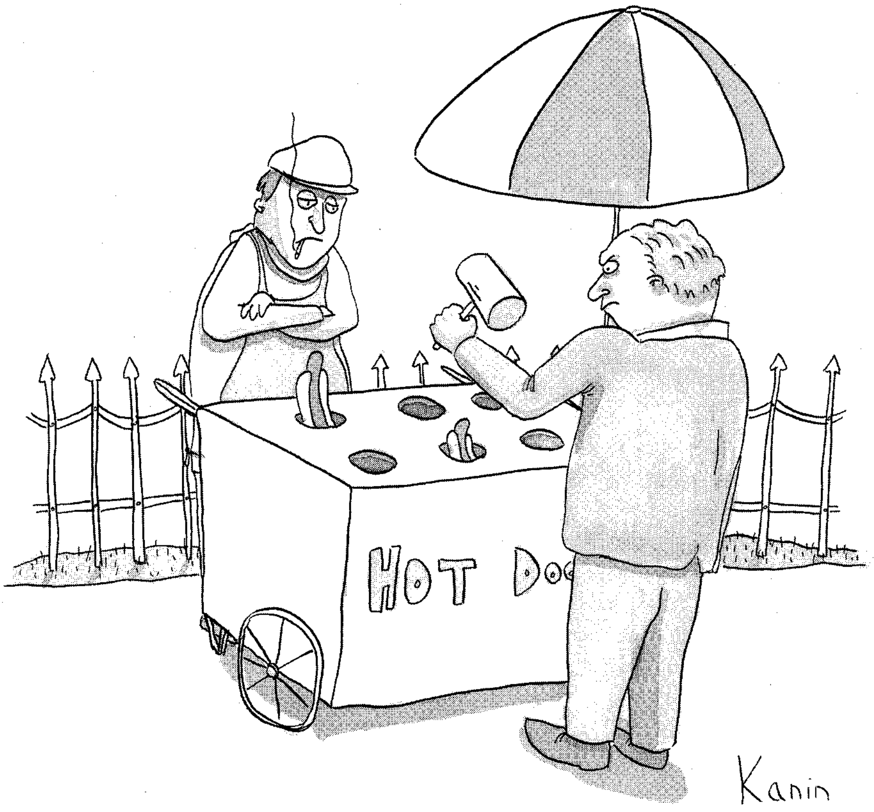
I was still able to do some work, during the day, a little work, though I was also staring a lot at the screen. I had command of a precise and specialized vocabulary that I could summon more or less at will. But the doubt had arisen, corroding my belief. Groups of words began to disintegrate under my intense gaze. I was like a man losing his faith, with no priest to turn to.

Always I had the sense that words concealed something, that if only I could abolish them I would discover what was actually there.

One evening I looked for a long time at my hand. Had I ever seen it before? I suppressed the word "hand," rid myself of everything but the act of concentration. It was no longer a hand, not a piece of flesh with nails, wrinkles, bits of reddish-blond hair. There was only a thing, not even that—only the place where my attention fell. Gradually I felt a loosening, a dissolution of the familiar. And I saw: a thickish mass, yellowish and red and blue, a pulsing thing with spaces, a shaded clump. It began to flatten out, to melt into surrounding space, to attach itself to otherness. Then I was staring at my hand again, the fingers slightly parted, the skin of the knuckles like small walnuts, the nails with vertical lines of faint shine. I could feel the words crawling over my hand like ants on a bone. But for a moment I had seen something else.

I am a normal man, wouldn't you say, intelligent and well educated, yes, with an aptitude for a certain kind of high-level work, but fundamentally normal, in temperament and disposition. I understood that what was happening to me was not within the range of the normal, and I felt, in addition to curiosity, an anger that this had come upon me, in the prime of life, like the onset of a fatal disease.

It was during one of those long evenings in my study, while you prowled somewhere in the house, that I recalled



an incident from my childhood. For some reason I was in my parents' bedroom, a forbidden place. I heard footsteps approaching. In desperation I stepped over to the closet, with its two sliding doors, then rolled one door open, plunged inside, pushed it shut. The long closet was divided into two parts, my mother's side and my father's side. I knew at once which side I'd entered by the dresses pressing against my cheeks, the tall pairs of high-heeled shoes falling against my ankles as I moved deeper within. Clumsily I crouched down among the fallen shoes, my head and shoulders buried in the bottoms of dresses And though I liked the sweetish, urine-sharp smell of the leather shoes, the rub of the dresses against my face, the hems heavy on my shoulders, the faint perfume drifting from folds of fabric like dust from a slapped bed, at the same time I felt oppressed by it all, bound tightly in place by the thick leathery smell and the stony fall of cloth, crushed in a black grip. The dresses, the shoes, the pinkish smell of perfume, the scratchy darkness, all pushed against me like the side of a big cat, thrust themselves into my mouth and nose like fur. I could not breathe. I opened my mouth. I felt the dark like fingers closing around my throat. In terror I stumbled up with a harsh scrape of hangers, pulled wildly at the edge of the door, burst outside. Light streamed through the open blinds. Tears of joy burned on my cheeks.

As I sat in my study, recalling my escape from the dresses, it seemed to me that the light streaming through my parents' blinds, in the empty room, was like the silence around me where I sat, and that the heavy dresses, the bittersweet smell of the shoes, the hand on my throat, were the world I had left behind.

I began to sense that there was another place, a place without words, and that if only I could concentrate my attention sufficiently, I might come to that place.

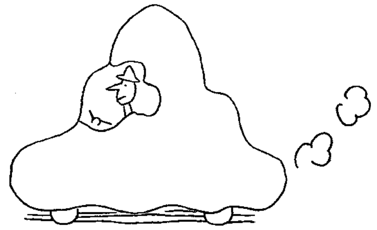
Once, when I was a student and had decided to major in business, I had an argument with a friend. He attacked business as a corrupt discipline, the sole purpose of which was to instill in people a desire to buy. His words upset me, not because I believed that his argument was sound but because I felt that he was questioning my character. I replied that what attracted me to business was the precision of its vocabulary—a self-enclosed world of carefully defined words that permitted clarity of thought.

At the office I could see people looking at me and also looking away from me. The looks reminded me of the look I had caught in the eyes of the girl with the little rings in her ear, as I tried to understand her words, and the look in your eyes that night at the Polinzanos' barbecue, when I opened my mouth and said nothing.

It was about this time that I began to notice, within me, an intention taking shape. I wondered how long it had been there, waiting for me to notice it. Though my mind was made up, my body hesitated. I was struck by how like me that was: to know, and not to act. Had I always been that way? It would be necessary to arrange a sick leave. There would be questions, difficulties. But aside from all that, finally to go through with it, never to turn back—such acts were not at all in my style.

And if I hesitated, it was also because of you. There you were, in the house. Already we existed in a courteous dark silence trembling with your crushed-down rage. How could I explain to you that words no longer meant what they once had meant, that they no longer meant anything at all? How could I say to you that words interfered with the world? Often I thought of trying to let you know what I knew I would do. But whenever I looked at you, your face was turned partly away.

I tried to remember what it was like to be a very young child, before the time of words. And yet, weren't words always there, filling the air around me? I remember faces bending close, uttering sounds, coaxing me to leave the world of silence, to become one of them. Sometimes, when I moved my face a little, I could almost feel my skin brushing against words, like clusters of tiny, tickling insects.



One night after you'd gone to bed I rose slowly in my study. I observed myself with surprise, though I knew perfectly well what was happening. Without moving my lips, I took a vow.

The next morning at breakfast I passed you a slip of paper. You glanced at it with disdain, then crumpled it in your fist. I remember the sound of the paper, which reminded me of fire. Your knuckles stuck up like stones.

When a monk takes a vow of silence, he does so in order to shut out the world and devote himself exclusively to things of the spirit. My vow of silence sought to renew the world, to make it appear before me in all its fullness. I knew that every element in the world—a cup, a tree, a day—was inexhaustible. Only the words that expressed it were vague or limited. Words harmed the world. They took something away from it and put themselves in its place.

When one knows something like that, Elena, one also knows that it isn't possible to go on living in the old way.

I began to wonder whether anything I had ever said was what I had wanted to say. I began to wonder whether anything I had ever written was what I had wanted to write, or whether what I had wanted to write was underneath, trying to push its way through.

After dinner that day, the day of the crumpled paper, I didn't go to my study but sat in the living room. I was hoping to soothe you somehow, to apologize to you with my presence. You stayed in the bedroom. Once, you walked from the bedroom to the guest room, where I heard you making up the bed.

One night as I sat in my leather chair, I had the sensation that you were standing at the door. I could feel a hot place at the back of my neck. I imagined you there in the doorway, looking at me with cold fascination, with a sort of tender and despairing iciness. I saw your tired eyes, your strained mouth. Were you trying to understand me? After all, you were my wife, Elena, and we had once been able to understand each other. I turned suddenly, but no one was there.

Do you think it's been easy for me? Do you? Do you think I don't know how grotesque it must seem? A grown man, forty-three years old, in excellent health, happily married, successful enough in his line of work, who suddenly refuses to speak, who flees the sound of others speaking, shuns the sight of the written word, avoids his wife, leaves his job, in order to shut himself up in his room or take long solitary walks—the idea is clownish, disgusting. The man is mad, sick, damaged, in desperate need of a doctor, a lover, a vacation, anything. Stick him in a ward. Inject him with something. But then, think of the other side. Think of it! Think of the terrible life of words, the unstoppable roar of sound that comes rushing out of people's mouths and seems to have no object except the evasion of silence. The talking species! We're nothing but an aberration, an error of Nature. What must the stones think of us? Sometimes I imagine that if we were very still we could hear, rising from the forests and oceans, the quiet laughter of animals, as they listen to us talk. And then, lovely touch, the invention of an afterlife, a noisy eternity filled with the racket of rejoicing angels. My own heaven would be an immense emptiness—a silence bright and hard as the blade of a sword.

Listen, Elena. Listen to me. I have something to say to you, which can't be said.

As I train myself to cast off words, as I learn to erase word-thoughts, I begin to feel a new world rising up around me. The old world of houses, rooms, trees, and streets shimmers, wavers, and tears away, revealing another universe as startling as fire. We are shut off from the fullness of things. Words hide the world. They blur together elements that exist apart, or they break elements into pieces, bind up the world, contract it into hard little pellets of perception. But the unbound world, the world behind the world—how fluid it is, how lovely and dangerous. At rare moments of clarity, I succeed in breaking through. Then I see. I see a place where nothing is known, because nothing is shaped in advance by words. There, nothing is hidden from me. There, every object presents itself entirely, with all its being. It's as if, looking at a house, you were able to see all four sides and both roof slopes. But then, there's no "house," no "object," no form that stops at a boundary, only a stream of manifold, precise, and nameless sensations, shifting into each other, pullulating, a fullness, a flow. Stripped of words, untamed, the universe pours in on me from every direction. I become what I see. I am earth, I am air. I am all. My eyes are suns. My hair streams among galaxies.

I am often tired. I am sometimes discouraged. I am always sure.

And still you're waiting, Elena—even now. Even now you're waiting for the explanation, the apology, the words that will justify you and set you free. But underneath that waiting is another waiting: you are waiting for me to return to the old way. Isn't it true? Listen, Elena. It's much too late for that. In my silent world, my world of exhausting wonders, there's no place for the old words with which I deceived myself, in my artificial garden. I had thought that words were instruments of precision. Now I know that they devour the world, leaving nothing in its place.

And you? Maybe a moment will come when you'll hesitate, hearing a word. In that instant lies your salvation. Heed the hesitation. Search out the space, the rift. Under this world there is another, waiting to be born. You can remain where you are, in the old world, tasting the bitter berries of disenchantment, or you can overcome yourself, rip yourself free of the word-lie, and enter the world that longs to take you in. To me, on this side, your anger is a failure of perception, your sense of betrayal a sign of the unawakened heart. Shed all these dead modes of feeling and come with me—into the glory of the fire.

Enough. You can't know what these words have cost me, I who no longer have words to speak with. It's like returning to the house of one's childhood: there is the white picket fence, there is the old piano, the Schumann on the music rack, the rose petals beside the vase, and there, look!—above the banister, the turn at the top of the stairs. But all has changed, all's heavy with banishment, for we are no longer who we were. Down with it. You too, Elena: let it go. Let your patience go, your bitterness, your sorrow—they're nothing but words. Leave them behind, in a box in the attic, the one with all the broken dolls. Then come down the stairs and out into the unborn world. Into the sun. The sun. ♦

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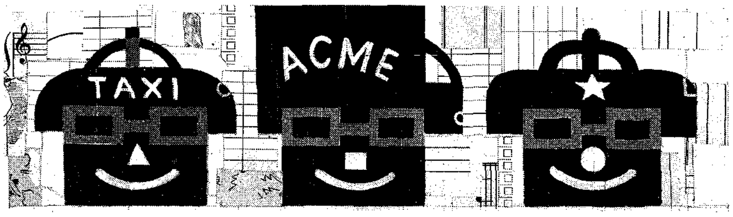


A CRITIC AT LARGE

THE NEW DISORDER

Adventures in film narrative.

BY DAVID DENBY

As an Academy Award nominee for best picture, “Babel” was a startling choice. The movie, which was written by Guillermo Arriaga and directed by Alejandro González Iñárritu, is composed of three stories held together by a slender thread, and the mood is darkly calamitous; even the few joyous moments are suffused with dread. In the Arriaga-Iñárritu world, if something bad can happen it happens—hardly a typical American movie's view of life. Earlier, the two men made, in Mexico, the bloody, turbulent “Amores Perros” (2000) and, in the United States, the dolorous “21 Grams” (2003), which starred Sean Penn, Naomi Watts, and Benicio Del Toro. Now, however, the collaborators have had a falling out (each claiming the greater credit for what appears in the movies). As they seem to be heading in separate directions, these fate-driven films can be seen as a kind of trilogy. All three send characters from separate stories smacking into one another in tragic accidents; all three jump backward and forward in a scrambling of time frames that can leave the viewer experiencing reactions before actions, dénouements before climaxes, disillusion before ecstasy, and many other upsetting reversals and discombobulations.

The Arriaga-Iñárritu films are hardly the sole topsy-turvy narratives out there. In recent years, we've had movies, like “Adaptation” (written by the antic confabulator Charlie Kaufman), that are explicitly about the making of movies, and others, like “Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind” (also written by Kaufman), that move forward dramatically by going backward in time. Then, there is a related group of clogged-sink narratives, like “Traffic,” “Syriana,” and “Miami Vice,” which are so heavily loaded with subplots and complicated information that the story can hardly seep through the surrounding material. “Syriana” made sense in the end, but you practically needed a database to sort out the story elements; the movie became a weird formal experiment, testing the audience's endurance and patience.

Some of the directors may be just playing with us or, perhaps, acting out their boredom with that Hollywood script-conference menace the conventional “story arc.” But others may be trying to jolt us into a new understanding of art, or even a new understanding of life. In the past, mainstream audiences notoriously resisted being jolted. Are moviegoers bringing some new sensibility to these riddling movies? What are we getting out of the overloading, the dislocations and disruptions?

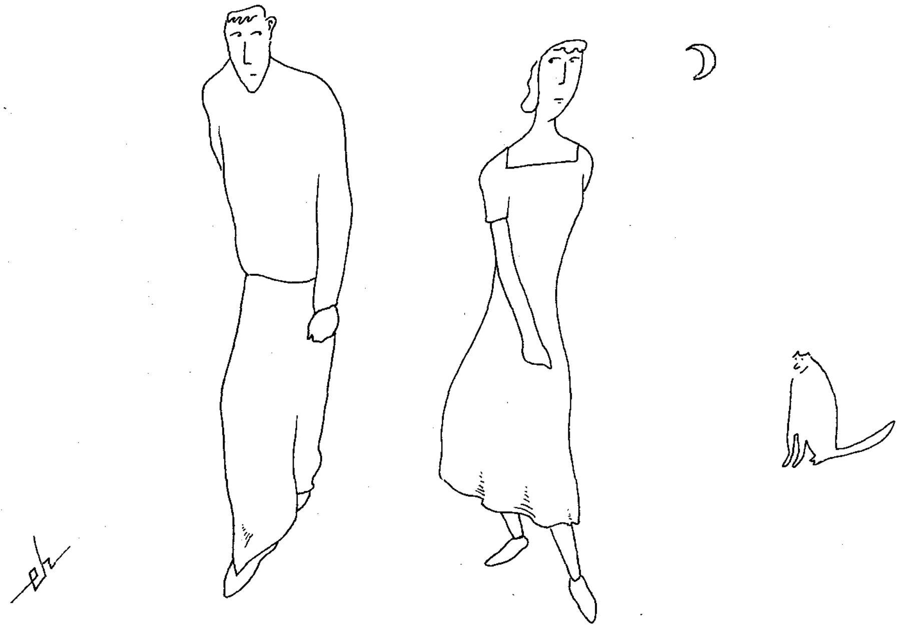
J. B. Priestley, putting into practice arcane theories about the simultaneity of past, present, and future, juggled time frames in his theatre work in the nineteen-thirties and forties. Harold Pinter, in “Betrayal,” his 1978 play about a love affair gone sour, ran time backward, from the bitter present to the happy past. But the current cycle of disordered narratives—in movies, at any rate—began with “Pulp Fiction,” Quentin Tarantino's malevolently funny pop masterwork from 1994. In the movie, which is made up of three stories, John Travolta goes to the bathroom four times. In the first story, Travolta, a lowlife enforcer, has been given the job of looking after Uma Thurman, the wife of a Los Angeles crime boss. At the boss's house, Travolta absents himself for a minute and, when he returns, discovers Thurman almost dead, her eyes rolling back into her head from the heroin he bought earlier that day. In the second story, he sits down to read a novel on the toilet in the apartment of Bruce Willis, a washed-up fighter he has been sent to kill. But Willis quietly enters the apartment, picks up the gun that Travolta has left on the kitchen counter, and, when Travolta steps out of the bathroom, blows him away. In the third story, Travolta, bloodied after accidentally killing a young man in the back seat of a car, goes to wash up with his equally blood-soaked partner, Samuel L. Jackson, and the two get into a preposterous argument over the appropriateness of getting the towels dirty.

Travolta is still alive, and arguing over towels, because the stories, despite some overlap, are not in sequence, and no attempt has been made to lock them into a unified, flowing progression in the viewer's head by using flashbacks, flash-forwards, parallel cutting among ongoing narratives, or any other means. The fourth trip? Travolta, toting the novel again, goes to the bathroom in a coffee shop, only to stumble out into a robbery in progress. A young couple is running around, screaming curses and waving guns—the same couple that we saw in the same coffee shop at the beginning of the movie. That stickup is a kind of ring encircling “Pulp Fiction”; what it encircles, though, is not a stable planet but three semi-independent narrative platforms, each one spinning on a magician's stick.

A sardonic view of chaos, “Pulp Fiction” suggests that contingency and chance rule a good part of our behavior. A trip to the bathroom, normally a quiet moment in anyone's life, becomes an absurdist entry wedge into metaphysical disharmony. Time is out of joint in “Pulp Fiction.” It doesn't really advance, which means that planning for future action is meaningless. By editing the

ILLUSTRATION BY JOHN RITTER/TOP TWO IMAGES, EVERETT COLLECTION; OTHER IMAGES, PHOTOFEST

Movies that experiment with chronology were once for a vanguard audience. Now they are for the mainstream.



We declined the good-night kiss, realizing that the slightest spark could ignite the poorly stored munitions of our love.

movie this way, Tarantino was also, I believe, getting at something inherent in all moviemaking. It's commonly said that the immediacy of film is so powerful that what's onscreen always feels like the present, even if the scene is set in the past. By scrambling the time sequence, Tarantino explicitly created an impression of the eternal present, the sense that what is happening was always happening, will always be happening.

"Pulp Fiction" was a highly influential movie, but the majority of narratives, of course, are still constructed in the traditional way. Event A leads to events B and C. Or, alternatively, the movie starts in the middle, with B, which necessarily throws us back to A, which eventually leads past B and onward to C. "The Good Shepherd," one of the best (and most underpraised) movies of last year, jumps all over the place, but the different time periods—the distant, intermediate, and recent past, as well as the present—are clearly marked elements in a chronological scheme that the viewer eventually assembles in his head as a continuous tale. The eighteenth-century Scottish philosopher David Hume spent years hoping to convince his readers that sequence does not necessarily imply causality, but I would guess that he didn't get very far with such contemporary narrative artists as Henry Fielding and Samuel Richardson (although Laurence Sterne, the proto-modernist prankster of "Tristram Shandy," may have been listening). Storytellers, relying on sequence and causality, make sense out of nonsense; they impose order, economy, and moral consequence on the helter-skelter wash of experience. The notion that one event causes another, and that the entire chain is a unified whole, with a complex, maybe ambivalent, but, in any case, coherent meaning, not only brings us to a point of resolution; it allows us to navigate through our lives.

The cinema, in which actors appear to be moving in consecutive time through patches of genuine space, has always created a strong expectation of realistic narrative. But here's the paradox: thanks to the mechanical nature of the recording medium (still photos, or digits, strung together in rapid succession), playing with sequence and representation is almost irresistible. As soon as film was invented, experimental film was invented. Some of the fooling around was just exuberant exploration of a fabulous new toy, but some of it arose from political or philosophical convictions, and was intended to turn us upside down.

For more than eighty years, frustrating our pleasure in the orderly unfolding of a story has been a familiar strategy of the political and artistic avant-garde. According to radical aesthetics, continuity is a bourgeois fetish, and disruptive experiments in form, which challenge the bourgeois's sense that the world belongs to him, are the first step toward revolution. This may be a delusion, but it's an enabling delusion. Buñuel the surrealist was more interested in artistic than political revolution, yet he mocked purely aesthetic responses to his early experiments. Of the audience reaction to his first collaboration with Salvador Dali, "Un Chien Andalou" (1928), in which disturbing erotic and violent images are arrayed in non-sequential order, he remarked, "The crowd of idiots found beauty and poetry in what was basically just a desperate, impassioned call to murder." More than forty years later, Buñuel was still placing stink bombs under cinema seats. In "The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie" (1972), the rapacious gentry assemble for the principal rite of their civilization—sitting down to dinner. But the director won't let them eat. Someone is always taking the movie off in new directions. Appetitive frustration becomes the model of narrative frustration. The audience's desire for a central story is thwarted, although, in the end, it was fed a richer meal of irony, anecdote, and ridicule.

Of all the highbrow directors of the late fifties and sixties, Alain Resnais, working with experimental writers like Alain Robbe-Grillet and Marguerite Duras, and drawing on ideas developed by those writers in their fictions, played the most extreme (and infuriating) games with time and narrative. In "Hiroshima, Mon Amour" (1959), two lovers, one French, one Japanese, mainly lie in bed trying to retrieve their memories of the war. The movie ceases to move forward in any conventional sense; and the past, it turns out, becomes ungraspable, even irrecoverable, leaving us stranded in an elegant time warp. In Resnais's "Muriel" (1963), a variety of distancing devices hold at arm's length an unendurable recollection—a French soldier's experience of torturing an Algerian girl. At the same time, the present-tense narrative is developed intermittently, and without the usual climaxes and tensions, so that the structure of the story's emotions, rather than their power, becomes the subject of the film.

Resnais's formalist work in the sixties was solemn and analytical. In the same period, Jean-Luc Godard, interrupting his commonplace B-movie plots with jokes, political lectures, and notes on film history, was savage and joyous. But both directors served a knowing audience, for whom experimentation was almost a norm, or at least something expected. By contrast, the recent examples of *cinéma désordonné* are meant for a mainstream audience. Suddenly life has become more interesting: when the audience's pleasure in narrative is diverted, or postponed, it may realize how conventional that pleasure usually is—how easily most movies yield to the desire for tension, release, and resolution. The kind of revelation that was once the possession of a privileged few—that formal play could not only enlarge your notion of art and entertainment but change your life—has moved out into the more volatile region of popular culture.

Michel Gondry's "Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind" (2004) goes back in time from the bleak aftermath of an affair, in which the two lovers (Jim Carrey and Kate Winslet) don't quite recognize each other, to its tender beginnings. When Carrey realizes that Winslet's memories of their relationship have been erased (by well-meaning mad scientists), he has his memories erased, too, but then, grief-stricken, he struggles to recover them. As they return, in odd fragments and sometimes in disguise, the movie's time-shifting mechanics, which are baffling and clumsy at first, lead to a pathos bordering on anguish. Pinter's "Betrayal," with a similar time scheme, performed a kind of archeological dig into the temperamental makeup of its characters; moving backward, it found hints of the disastrous behavior of the present in small remarks and acts of long ago. There the rottenness started early, while in "Sunshine" the beginning was pure. The movie is a near-masochistic feast for romantics who live or die by their hold on the roots of emotion. It gives body to the ineffable.

"Memento" (2001), which the British director Christopher Nolan wrote with his brother Jonathan Nolan (from a story by Jonathan), is a more brutal thrust at our unconscious. (Seeing it again recently, I was spooked for days.) The hero, Leonard Shelby (Guy Pearce), remembers his entire past up to a certain point—the moment of an assault in which he thinks his wife was killed. In the same assault, he lost his short-term memory; he forgets, after a few minutes, what he's just experienced. He wants revenge for his wife's death, but, when he haplessly falls into the middle of a drug deal gone bad, some of the other players, drawing on his rage, inflame him against their enemies. He kills a couple of strangers but can't remember who or why. The movie has a richly sardonic relation to genre history. In the classic Elizabethan and Jacobean revenge tragedies, the violent acts of the avenger often engulf the hero who commits them, but Leonard takes revenge without consequence. His limits free him: the existential moment of action is the only consciousness he possesses. Once enraged, he can't stop himself from carrying out the perfect crime.

Jorge Luis Borges wrote a story, "Funes the Memorious," about a man who is paralyzed by his inability to forget anything. Leonard is the opposite: he remembers things by inscribing them on his body—his tattooed flesh becomes a text devoted to warnings and instructions—and his writing sends him into action. In sympathy with Leonard's difficulties, the movie begins with the events that happen latest in time and then, in consecutive order, moves backward: Chapter 12, followed by Chapter 11, and so on. And each chapter, establishing the present moment—say, Leonard conscious of himself alone in a motel room—goes back to its own beginning and then forward again to the present. At first, such structural legerdemain may seem a gimmick, but, through repetition, it develops a hurtling power: pitched back into the origins of a given action, we seem to be travelling according to the operation of a new physical law. "Memento" has the haunted feeling of a science-fiction masterpiece, but this is science fiction without a trace of fantasy. Leonard, at the beginning of his quest for revenge (that is, at the end of the movie), says, with a burst of exhilaration, "I have to believe in a world outside my own mind." This most subjective of films is also a stunning reaffirmation that the world exists.

All these movies draw on a sophistication about cinema that is now almost universal. We know that a film is not a piece of life; we know that it is something made. And we're used to being shoved around in time—we may even be doing some of the shoving ourselves. Twenty-five years ago, the videotape transfer of a film sustained the notion of a movie as a continuous track: you could run it forward or backward, but the film was "printed" on magnetic tape, and you remained on the track. Digital information, on the other hand, can be infinitely manipulated; you can jump from one place to another or cut the movie into pieces. At home, kids create "mash-ups"—chopping sections out of a feature film, mixing the excerpts with their own material, and posting the result on the Web as a madcap original creation. The danger of instant editing, of course, is not just disordered time sequences but glibness. Some of the big Hollywood action films move so quickly that they eliminate the most rudimentary emotional attachment to the material. It would be terrible if computer editing wiped out the proper emotional *resistance* to making a cut—the lingering grave affection for a face, a landscape, an interior, even the resonance of an empty space.

No one could accuse Guillermo Arriaga and Alejandro González Iñárritu of glibness or an indifference to sentiment. The world of their movies is one of extreme emotional violence, disastrous mishaps, wearying desperation. At first glance, their filmmaking is grindingly earnest. Iñárritu has an instinctive feeling for the volatility of hard-pressed people, for the varieties of explosive sexual temperament, and he has drawn committed, almost reckless performances out of such actors as Gael García Bernal, Benicio Del Toro, Naomi Watts—even Brad Pitt, as the man trying to save his wife's life in "Babel." Iñárritu has never directed a flat or indifferently shaped scene, and, working with the cinematographer Rodrigo Prieto, he has produced landscapes bristling with iconic power—the alleys behind Mexico's mean streets, the winding roads in the arid mountains of Morocco, the fantastical night scenes of neon Tokyo.

Arriaga and Iñárritu are experimentalists in form but sorrowful humanists in temperament. From the first, they have been reworking the three-part, asynchronous structure of "Pulp Fiction," but without the jokes, the wild profane talk, the gleeful pleasure in life's screwed-upness. Arriaga reportedly wrote thirty-six drafts of the screenplay for "Amores Perros," and one can only admire the ingenuity with which he distributes the narrative space to the people of Mexico City. Each of the three main characters—a battling, lovesick working-class boy; a dopey model who has a married upper-bourgeois lover; a savage ex-guerrilla who works as an assassin—dominates his own story but appears as a minor character in the two other stories. All three tales, connected by a car crash, are essentially dog stories, with the animals mimicking their owners' traits: the boy's Rottweiler fights magnificently in local high-stakes competitions; the model's decorative, fluffy Lhasa Apso falls into a hole and gets nibbled by rats; the remorseless killer's mangy strays accompany him in his shabby but liberated life. The movie's pessimism is extreme, but it feels rooted in the streets and folklore of Mexico City, where experience melds into legend and individual misfortune is part of life's infinite danger. When the social breakdown is general, bad luck hardly seems arbitrary. As in "Pulp Fiction," the three stories are only vaguely related in time, and the emotional result is similar—an uncanny feeling that all this is happening now, was always happening, will always be happening. Only a literalist would demand causality within a malaise.

That convincing sense of rootedness and inevitability disappeared, however, when Arriaga and Iñárritu moved north. In "21 Grams," which is set in a dank, drizzling American nowheresville, calamitousness floats free and unhinged, and the sober awe that one felt before "Amores Perros" turns to disdain. Del Toro's ex-con runs over a father and his two little girls; the dead man's heart gets transplanted into the body of an expiring mathematics professor (Sean Penn); and the professor decides to seduce, of all people, the victim's widow. At this point, the math professor, with his new heart, begins dying again. But that isn't tragedy; it's a lachrymose sick joke, and it made me wonder if Arriaga and Iñárritu hadn't fallen into the fallacy of thinking that misery was somehow more real than happiness, death a greater subject than life.

Godard once said that he wanted to make films with a beginning, a middle, and an end, but not necessarily in that order. "21 Grams" moves sideways and turns itself inside out, but in no order. We see Sean Penn lying in a hospital bed and then, a few scenes later, moving around outdoors, and then back in bed, and then making love, and then nearly dead, and so on. But why? Since none of the characters are part of any reality that makes sense to us, we can't say, as we did at "Amores Perros," that a social malaise has made the normal sequencing of the story irrelevant. On the contrary, we may wonder if Iñárritu and his editor didn't scissor the movie into fragments in order to give soap-opera dismalness the appearance of radical art.

The same suspicion of pretentious fatalism and structural willfulness shadowed my response to "Babel." The movie is a lofty globe-hopping lament over mishaps and misunderstandings in wildly dissimilar places—Morocco, Southern California and Mexico, and Japan. We are scattered into different languages and habits, and either we can't talk to one another at all or we fall into gruesome misunderstandings. And yet human life has a shape. Parents and children live together everywhere. The theme appears to be the cohesion of life within the seeming disorder of life. The different stories are related in subject. Yet they fall out of synch with one another in bizarre ways.

In the first twenty minutes or so of "Babel," there are three narrative tracks: two Moroccan boys with a high-powered rifle that was left in the mountains by a vacationing Japanese hunter; a wealthy American couple (Brad Pitt and Cate Blanchett) on a tour-bus holiday in the same mountains; and the Americans' Mexican housekeeper and their young children back in San Diego. The Moroccan boys are fooling around and one of them shoots at the bus, but we don't know where the bullet lands. Instead, in the San Diego house, we hear a distraught and demanding Brad Pitt calling from abroad—an event that, we find out, takes place a couple of days later. Then we see Pitt and Blanchett having a tense lunch together; they climb into the tour bus, and, as Blanchett sleeps, she's hit in the neck by the bullet fired by the boy in the mountains. Internally, each of the three tracks runs in chronological order (and I'm leaving out the introduction of another narrative, in which the deaf daughter of the Japanese hunter—a girl grieving over her mother's suicide, and longing for some sort of sexual contact—exposes herself to boys and men). Yet the tracks, which detail events happening simultaneously, are edited together in ways that make them disjointed in time. The editing also withholds information, not so much to create suspense as to uncouple the intent of an act from its result, the reason for a telephone call from the impression it makes.

In other words, part of the disconnection that the movie presents as a universal fact of our world is produced by the odd way it is put together. And, once one notices the inorganic structuring of the material, and the hostile tease of the editing, one begins to wonder if the conjunction of so many mishaps isn't a kind of abuse of the freedom that's normally granted to fiction. The Mexican housekeeper, having taken the children across the border, gets into trouble when returning to the United States. After that, damned if she doesn't lose the children in the desert, at which point I lost all faith in the movie. "Life is like that," I heard people in the audience say. Actually, a certain kind of pseudo-serious bad fiction is like that. Arriaga and Iñárritu end the movie with a series of reconciliations and salvations that leave the audience weeping. "Babel" feels like the first example of a new genre—the highbrow globalist tearjerker.

Now, at the conclusion of the trilogy, the calamities in these movies seem programmatic, rather than haphazard. In "Amores Perros," the capitalist playmate—a blond model—is treated nastily by the filmmakers, while, at the end of the movie, the jauntily imperious ex-guerrilla and murderer lights out for fresh territory, like the hero of an old Western. In "Babel," the privileged carelessness of the First World characters, giving their guns away and leaving their kids behind, plants the seeds of what goes wrong. There's a pattern to the disasters: a punitive attack on the selfishness of the rich can't pass itself off as the mere impersonal merciless working out of fate. Experience can't be random and also structured like a cage.

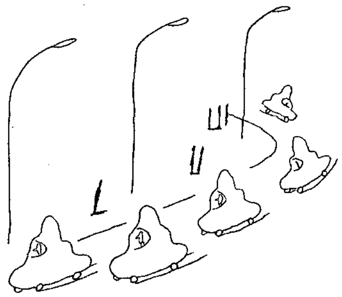
Arriaga and Iñárritu may be too obsessed with the unfair distribution of power and capital in the world to operate freely as radical experimenters in form. In 1960, in the great "L'Avventura," Michelangelo Antonioni set up a mystery—a young woman disappears on an island—and then refused to solve it. The woman's friends, after initially pledging a search, begin a guilty affair. The movie's mournful despair suggests how often we pay homage to appropriate moral sentiments while our real feelings drift elsewhere. The plot divagation put a crack in the moral universe, and the audience, at first baffled, then wounded by self-recognition, fell into it. "L'Avventura" was an open form; it didn't play around with time sequences, but it altered our sense of how life works. The Arriaga-Iñárritu films, for all their structural innovations, are closed, even overdetermined, forms—puzzle boxes. All the pieces are there to be put together in our heads, but the rich ambivalence of art somehow slips away as we reconstruct the way one thing connects to another.

Playing with time can be a brilliant provocation, but one response to its misuse is the new German film "The Lives of Others," which recently opened here. The movie dramatizes not a series of trumped-up misadventures but a fully realized historical nightmare—the spying by the East German State Security Service (the Stasi) on many of its citizens in the Communist era. Since it's a film about secrets, the audience needs to know exactly what everyone in the movie knows, or thinks he knows, at any given moment. These characters fall into dreadful mishaps, too, but their mistakes are a result not of fate but of a monstrous system intruding into every corner of their lives. And what is the device that gives "The Lives of Others" its shattering power? Straightforward chronology driven by cross-cutting among parallel actions, a technique that was invented by D. W. Griffith almost a hundred years ago. It still may be the best way of leading us to the paradise of a morally complicated but flawlessly told story. ♦

BRIEFLY NOTED

Knots, *by Nuruddin Farah (Riverhead; $25.95).* The second novel in a trilogy that began with "Links" features, like its predecessor, a Somali emigrant who returns to the war-ravaged wasteland of Mogadishu. Cambara, with years of martial-arts training behind her and an inner rage that has taken a "murderous turn" after the drowning death of her son in the back-yard swimming pool of her husband's lover, seeks to wrest her family's property from a middle-ranking warlord. But her activities in her homeland are largely peaceable: she decides that work in theatre provides a means to bring healing to a populace suffering from the corrosive effects of years of civil war. Farah, unlike in his previous book, gestures toward the possibility of regeneration, as Cambara labors to create a living future in "a city rampant with the ghosts of its innocent dead."

The Solitude of Thomas Cave, *by Georgina Harding (Bloomsbury; $23.95).* This austere but atmospheric début novel tells the story of Thomas Cave, a taciturn seventeenth-century British whaler who accepts a bet to remain on an unexplored island in East Greenland for a year. It's a place where one can "experience the most extreme cold and blizzard even at the height of August," and where Cave's shipmates are "touched with dread even when the sun shone." Harding overreaches when she attempts to make Cave's experiences emblematic of humankind's predatory relationship with the natural world, but her accounts of Cave's daily struggle for survival (even inside his tent "everything that does not face towards the fire is frozen") are powerful, and she reveals myriad gradations of light and color in what first appears a blank and unchanging landscape.



Family Romance, *by John Lanchester (Putnam; $27.95).* Lanchester had always sensed "a kind of interior Area 51" in his mother's past, but it was not until her death, when he was thirty-six, that he discovered her secret: thirty-eight years before, she had officially (but illegally) changed her name and age. In this memoir, he attempts to understand the reasons for, and effects of, her lie, by tracing the stories of his parents' lives—his mother's as the oldest of eight in rural Ireland and as a missionary nun in Madras, his father's as the only child of colonial adventurers interned in Hong Kong during the Second World War. Both histories brim with fascinating details of largely vanished times. (Lanchester's childhood was "post-colonial in the sense that we kept getting kicked out of colonies that didn't want to be colonies anymore.") His mother's subterfuge, he says, made him realize that "one of the main reasons I am a writer is that she couldn't be one. And the reason she couldn't be one is that she couldn't tell the truth."

The Lost Life of Eva Braun, *by Angela Lambert (St. Martin's; $29.95).* Dismissed by members of Hitler's inner circle as a "*blöde Kuh*"—a silly cow—Eva Braun struck an incongruously middle-class note in the feverish atmosphere of the Berghof compound. Braun was not a fanatical believer, like Magda Goebbels, or even interested in politics, and in this biography Lambert attempts a rehabilitation of the nice seventeen-year-old Catholic girl who met Hitler in 1929. However, the reader recoils when empathy extends to claiming Braun as a kind of victim of Hitler. This misses the creepiness of her position, which is encapsulated in a story told by Albert Speer (and not included by Lambert) about perhaps the only time Braun stood up to Hitler politically: in 1943, she protested the newly imposed restrictions on beauty products. While Lambert may well be right about Braun's personal demeanor, she never quite grasps her astonishing moral frivolity.

THE ART WORLD

FLASHES OF LIGHT

Jeff Wall's pictures.

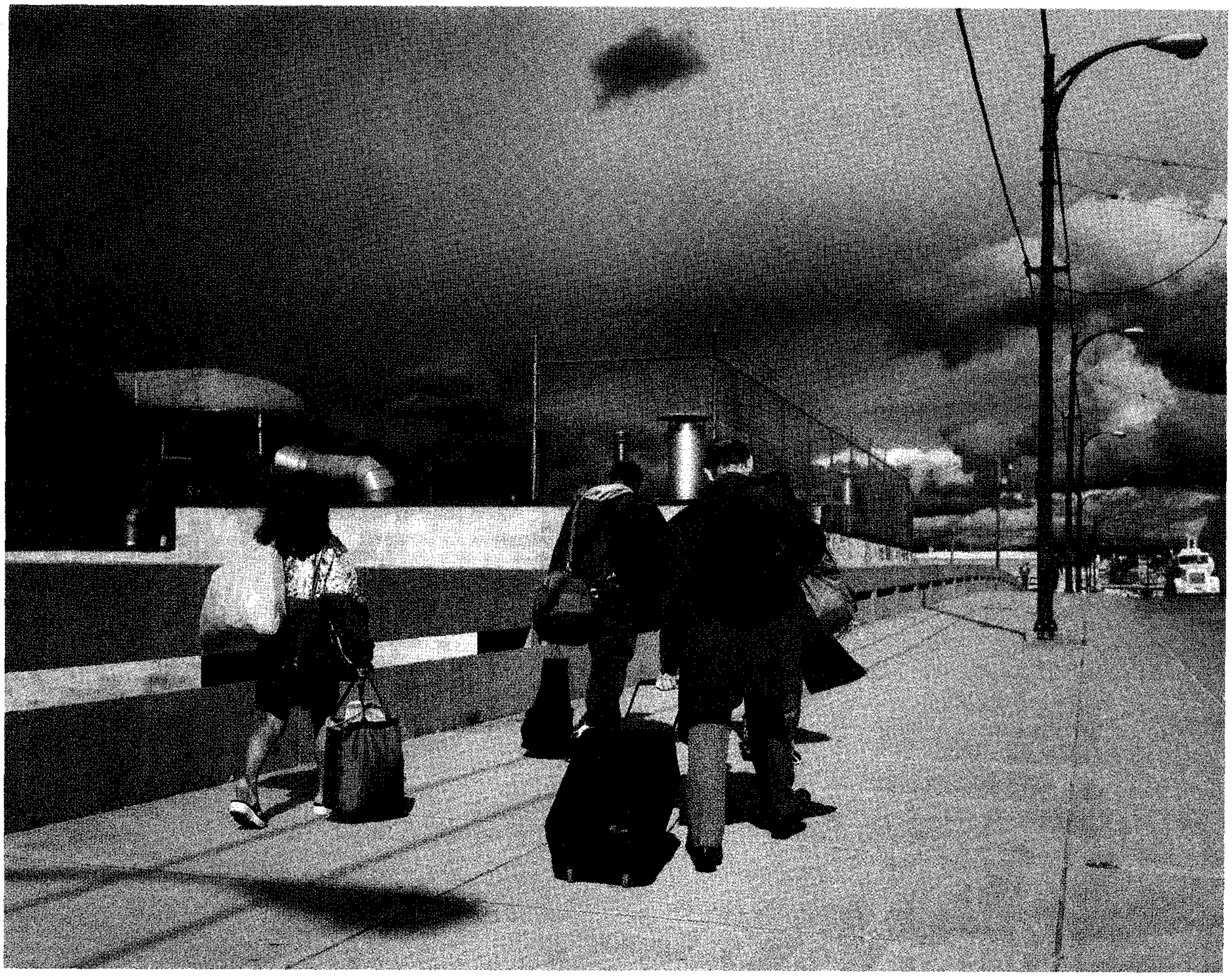
BY PETER SCHJELDAHL

The Museum of Modern Art's retrospective of the resourceful Vancouver photographic artist Jeff Wall is richly uneven. It suggests less a career than a case history, tracking an intellectually ambitious, morally earnest perfectionist through the fevers and chills of latter-day avant-gardism, in which he has starred for nearly three decades. Rarely are viewers permitted to relax and enjoy the intrinsic gorgeousness of Wall's signature medium—big color transparencies of cinematically staged, often digitally jiggered scenes, mounted on fluorescent light boxes. The prevailing style is realist, but it is regularly beset by mixed, toilsome aims: Wall has harbored enough motives to impel several artists, and they have tended to get in the way of one another. There is the righteous Wall, who lodges complaints on behalf of racial minorities and the poor: in "Mimic" (1982), a bearded lout makes an insulting gesture to an Asian man on a city street; "An Eviction" (1988, reworked in 2004) is an aerial view of a neighborhood in which a violent dispossession takes place. The erudite Wall imports art-historical and ideological arcana with motifs from Manet, Hokusai, or Walker Evans here and a redolence of German or French critical theory there; Guy Debord's "The Society of the Spectacle" (1967), among other strenuous texts, influenced Wall's adoption of commercial signage techniques, in a spirit of criticizing mass culture. Wall the director deploys Brechtian alienation effects, to a fault, in his use of models and actors: in "The Goat" (1989), the stilted postures of four boys bullying a fifth quash any possible drama. Finally, there is Wall the lurking suitor of beauty in landscape, cityscape, interior, and still-life. He's my favorite, and, lately, the most prominent. The retrospective and a concurrent show of notably strong new pictures at the Marian Goodman gallery give a strange impression of development in reverse: an artist doing his relatively uncomplicated early work last.

Wall was born in Vancouver in 1946. His mother and his father, a doctor, encouraged his early passion for art. By the age of fourteen, Wall was painting in his own studio, in a shed in the family's back yard. Exposure to recent big-time art, by Jackson Pollock and others, at the Seattle World's Fair, in 1962, fired his ambition. While studying art history at the University of British Columbia, he switched from painting to recondite exercises in photo-and-text Conceptualism, embracing newly fashionable ideas that—as he recalled them, with ambivalence, in a 2003 interview—"the art of the past was 'obsolete' (to use the Leninist terminology of the time) and that the only serious possibilities lay in reinventing the avant-garde project of going beyond 'bourgeois art.'" In 1970, his work appeared in MOMA's landmark Conceptualism show, "Information," but by then, feeling himself at a dead end, he had stopped making art; he did not resume for seven years. Instead, he continued his studies at the august Courtauld Institute of Art, in London, where he read voraciously in philosophy and critical theory, undertook a thesis on Marcel Duchamp's readymades, and aspired to make films. But, back in Canada, an attempt at collaborative filmmaking with some friends came to nothing. Exacting standards—it seems fair to term him a control freak—evidently made him a poor team player. Wall taught art history and theory in Halifax and Vancouver, and began to explore staged color photography. The idea of using light boxes came to him, in what admiring critics have liked to celebrate as a road-to-Damascus flash, on a bus trip in Spain in 1977.

I well remember the impact of the first sumptuous and esoteric Walls, including "Picture for Women" (1979); more than five feet high by almost seven feet wide, it presents the artist (slim, dark-eyed, worried-looking) and a taciturn young woman, both in street clothes, in front of a mirrored wall that reflects a studio but, disconcertingly, not them, and has a big view camera facing out at dead center. The work was inspired by Manet's dizzying painting of a barmaid standing before a mirror, "A Bar at the Folies-Bergère," and by Marxist and feminist analyses of that work by the art historian T. J. Clark and the critic Laura Mulvey (known for her scolding critiques of "the male gaze"). The technical trickiness and semiotic density of Wall's picture daunt the mind even as its handsomeness holds the eye. "Any moderately serious student of his art . . . faces a considerable stack of homework," MOMA's chief photography curator, Peter Galassi, remarks in a thorough, levelheaded introduction to the show's catalogue. It may be enough to know that, in theory-drunk circles of the period, any sort of aesthetic appeal could be regarded as a stratagem of "late capitalist" ideology or some other wrinkle of malign social power. (The enemy's identity was never entirely clear.) Artists were obliged to signal knowingness on this score. If critical paranoia poisoned visual and imaginative pleasure, that was unavoidable: a toll of enlightened consciousness. A lot of preachily condescending work resulted, and Wall was not exempt. But a certain quotient of unauthorized excitement, in "wow" effects of what amounts to single-frame cinematography, always set him a bit apart, as did a restlessly experimental drive.

"The Storyteller" (1986) is an imposing picture, more than fourteen feet wide. Six negligently clothed Native Americans lounge under or, on a grassy and wooded slope, beside a highway overpass. One, a woman, transfixes two others with what she is saying across a dying campfire. The historical irony—of a tribal custom maintained on expropriated and ruined land—is painfully obvious and, coming from a mandarin white artist, borderline presumptuous. The self-conscious poses of the characters seem meant to undercut easy interpretation. We are to know that Wall knows that we know that the work is fictional—quotation marks set in quotation marks, and, if we detect the odd quotation from a quotational painting by Manet, we may go straight to the head of the class. If you like this type of heady gaming, good luck. It exasperates



Wall's "Overpass" (2001). Burdened pedestrians, a featureless bridge, and a stormy sky that breathes poetry.

COURTESY MARIAN GOODMAN GALLERY

me. But I gazed long and raptly at the wonderful textures of spongy grass, dully reflective flagstones, and dreaming concrete. I love the look of that mighty overpass and would gladly toss out the figures to behold it without distraction. Does this response discover a further, subtle, conscience-needling irony? I don't care. I've ceased to buy whatever is being sold by the picture's maker, who seems to be engaged in special pleading as much for his right to manipulate me as for the cause of displaced Indians.

Wall's best work, which has appeared with greater frequency since about 1990, does more with less. Not that it lightens up—the artist brings inexplicable solemnity even to still-lifes of beans, an octopus, or a bar of soap, all in flavorfully dilapidated interiors. (The shots do have elaborate historical and critical pedigrees—drawing on obscure work from the thirties by the German artist Wols and manifesting academically voguish notions of "abjection" and "the formless"—but, for a change, we may remain comfortably innocent of them.) "A View from an Apartment" (2004-05) smacks of a real and satisfying movie: two women in modest modern digs, full of piquant social and economic cues, with a postcardlike, picture-window view of a busy harbor. It's almost fun. Also pleasing is the anecdote of a woman inspecting an auction catalogue in a snootily decorated room, disrupted by a glimpse of city street, sporting fortuitous patches of primary colors, outside the window. It is a fine photograph.

Tastes may honestly differ apropos the painstaking illustrations of scenes from novels by Ralph Ellison and Yukio Mishima. I take it on faith that Wall has represented all one thousand three hundred and sixty-nine light bulbs in the protagonist's basement lair which Ellison mentions in the prologue to "The Invisible Man." I prefer my own old, surreal imagining of that space, which Ellison hardly describes, to the picture's nitpicky realism. But I'm impressed by Wall's bravery in tackling literary illustration, perhaps the single most despised genre in the lexicon of modern art. Firmly absorbing, meanwhile, are his views of luggage-burdened pedestrians on a featureless bridge and of young people loitering on the sidewalk outside a gritty night club. Digital manipulation emphasizes the placement and the posture of the figures just enough to give them a speaking presence, and the stormy sky of the first picture and the nocturnal cast of the second breathe poetry. And I can't get enough of "Rear-View, Open Air Theater" (2005), at Goodman: a decrepit but noble old wooden structure, bearing signs of emergency repair and sorely in need of more, that becomes a moving allegory of cultural aspiration besieged by callous time. Little by little, Wall is edging out of the collegiate hothouse of smart-aleck ideas and into a (if not the) world. ♦

MUSICAL EVENTS

AGIT-OPERA

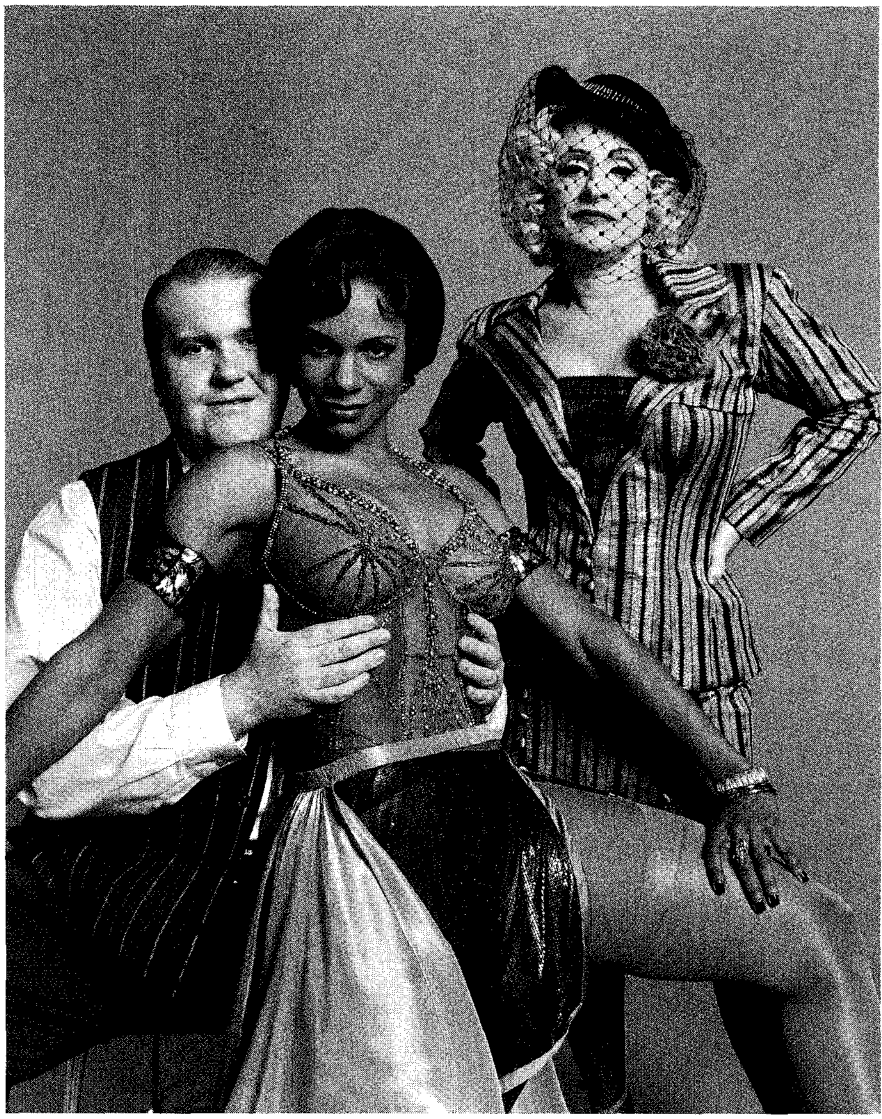
"Mahagonny" and "The Grapes of Wrath."

BY ALEX ROSS

Bertolt Brecht, the great politicizer of art, thought that opera was too laden with tradition to deliver shocks to the social order. As far as he was concerned, "Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny," his 1930 collaboration with Kurt Weill, fell into the category of "culinary opera"—a medium of transient pleasure, even if it managed to leave a delectably bitter taste in the mouths of the middle classes. Weill, though, believed that opera could comprehensively synthesize art, entertainment, and critique, and "Mahagonny," which progresses implacably from the vinegar pop of the "Alabama Song" to the Mahlerian hammer blows of the final scene, crystallized his vision. Indeed, Brecht spoke slightingly of the project in large part because Weill made it his own; it's less a piece of up-to-date agitprop than a timeless morality tale, describing an Everyman's downfall in an unusually diverting hell on earth. For a long time, it was fashionable to dismiss Weill as the lesser of the two collaborators, because he gave up leftist composition in favor of a comfortable Broadway career; yet his conception of musical theatre as an art-pop hybrid has proved to be one of the twentieth century's enduring legacies, reverently cited every time an ambitious young composer tries to shake up the routines of risk-averse Broadway theatres or opera houses.

"Mahagonny" is having a cultural moment. A production by John Doyle, who recently directed "Sweeney Todd" and "Company" on Broadway, is playing at the Los Angeles Opera through March 4th, while another staging appeared last week at Opera Boston; a third is scheduled for the Spoleto Festival, in Charleston, South Carolina, in May and June. It's not hard to guess why a tale of a pleasure-seeking American city threatened by a hurricane seems au courant, or why Brecht's assault on winner-take-all capitalism doesn't feel dated in the least. The relevance of the material has not, however, made it any easier to stage. "Mahagonny" is a delicate balancing act between Brecht's pitilessness and Weill's humanism, not to mention a tricky synthesis of classical and popular traditions.

Doyle errs on the side of the culinary, skimming over the darker, knottier aspects of the piece. His Mahagonny is made to resemble Las Vegas—a logical choice, given Brecht's canny prophecy of a vice-ridden paradise city rising in the American desert. Mark Bailey's sets are sleek and spare, with iconic elements arranged in wide-open space—a highway sign, a dangling traffic light glowing red, neon ads for cocktails and dancing girls. The action onstage flows smoothly: Jimmy McIntyre, a lumberjack from Alaska, is shown riding high in Mahagonny's nightspots, then is dragged down in a televised show trial when he commits the ultimate crime of running out of money. But the show lacks bite; its gestures are too slick and familiar. When Doyle tries to indicate a wider political context, he makes several major miscalculations, the most serious of which occurs at the end of the first act: the cast raises its arms in Fascist salutes while fragments of a Hitler speech resound on loudspeakers throughout the auditorium.



The stars of the L.A. Opera production of "Mahagonny": Anthony Dean Griffey, Audra McDonald, and Patti LuPone. Photograph by Yelena Yemchuk.

Given Brecht's own weakness for totalitarian ideology, it's unwise to depict "Mahagonny" as a cautionary tale about the attractions of Fascism.

Also problematic is the production's waffling between Broadway and operatic singing styles. On one side of the divide is Patti LuPone, as the gangsterish bigwig Leocadia Begbick, holding the audience mesmerized with her wise-ass attitude but struggling to encompass Weill's high-lying vocal lines. On the other side is the superb young American tenor Anthony Dean Griffey, who hits all the notes but cossets them in diction that sounds rather too plummy for a lumberjack—"ahnd" for "and," "yoooo" for "you." The one performer who covers all the bases is Audra McDonald, singing the role of the prostitute Jenny with impeccable musicianship while exuding eyebrow-raising sexiness and sass. Burning in her eyes, from her first entrance, is a cold ambition to get ahead, which turns deliciously poisonous in Act III: she makes the "Benares Song"—"There is not much fun on this star"—a thing of drugged beauty, the pursuit of pleasure transformed into empty compulsion.

At the second performance in the run, James Conlon conducted in properly incisive, unsentimental fashion, refusing to linger over the favorite tunes. Right at the start, he underlined the fateful military beat that accompanies the founding of Mahagonny—Weill's allusion, I think, to the morbid finale of Mahler's Sixth Symphony—and by the end that same drumbeat sounded with scarily frigid force, chained to a machine-like, unyielding tempo. What was missing in the final scene was a strong stage picture to match the sound. When Jimmy is executed, Jenny is presented with a folded-up flag, which is evidently meant to remind us of Iraq; as with the Hitler salute, it feels gratuitous. Brecht's instruction in the libretto cannot be bettered: a ragged procession of protesters, carrying contradictory placards, staggering toward the audience, a mirror image of our own political confusion.

By Brecht-Weill standards, American opera composers have been playing it safe these days, glomming on to one classic book or play after another, preferably one that Hollywood turned into an equally classic movie in the forties or fifties. "A Streetcar Named Desire," "Little Women," "The Great Gatsby," "An American Tragedy," and "Miss Lonelyhearts" all fit the description. At first glance, Ricky Ian Gordon's "The Grapes of Wrath," which recently had its première at the Minnesota Opera, would seem to be one more entry in the book-club genre. But it has teeth. John Steinbeck's 1939 novel is, for all its hoary gestures, a passionately political work, showing in excruciating detail the fate of an Oklahoma family during the Great Depression, and Gordon, working in tandem with his librettist, Michael Korie, has found ways to leave its rage intact, even as he gives lyric voice to the suffering Joad clan.

"The Grapes of Wrath" won't please Brechtians who demand total alienation from theatrical conventions. Gordon, who first made his name in the theatre and as a composer of Broadway-style songs, fills his score with beautifully turned genre pieces, often harking back to American popular music of the twenties and thirties: Gershwinesque song-and-dance numbers, a few sweetly soaring love songs in the manner of Jerome Kern, banjo-twanging ballads, saxed-up jazz choruses, even a barbershop quartet. You couldn't ask for a more comfortably appointed evening of vintage musical Americana. Yet, with a slyness worthy of Weill, Gordon wields his hummable tunes to critical effect, as in a song-and-dance number devoted to the mass-production methods of Endicott Canneries, where the itinerant Joads seek employment. "Savor the flavor / choosy mothers favor / Always ask your grocer / For Endicott Brand," a women's chorus sings, in harmonies that clash slightly as they bounce along. It's a commercial jingle that can't conceal its cynical grimace.

The opera is framed and punctuated by a string of powerful choral numbers, which take the place of those two- or three-page prose poems in which Steinbeck depicted the deprivations of the Dust Bowl and California's Central Valley. Here Gordon makes clear his growing ambitions as a theatre composer, a seriousness of purpose that had already surfaced in his haunting 2005 theatre piece "Orpheus and Euridice" (staged at Lincoln Center last season). The orchestra periodically echoes Copland in his "open prairie" mode—Bruce Coughlin helped prepare the finespun orchestrations—and the choral writing achieves an ardent simplicity that is very much Gordon's own. One question hanging over this formidable work is whether each of the three acts is paced to best effect; a few trims or reorderings of numbers might benefit the whole. Then again, the opera achieves its impact because it does not skimp on detail and preserves the hugeness of Steinbeck's canvas.

The Minnesota Opera may lack the high-powered resources of the L.A. Opera, which is presently being run by Plácido Domingo, but Eric Simonson and Allen Moyer, the director and the set designer, respectively, of "The Grapes of Wrath," put together a handsome, flexible production. Each geographical setting—the Dust Bowl, Route 66, Endicott Canneries, a Hooverville—was established in quick, crisp strokes. Deanne Meek anchored the production with her strong, clear-voiced, unmannered portrayal of Ma Joad; Brian Leerhuber was stonily eloquent as her son Tom, and Kelly Kaduce warmly expressive as Rosasharn. Among singers in the smaller roles, the young baritone Kelly Markgraf stood out for his ringing voice and telling diction. (In a sign of the times, you can already watch a clip of him singing the "Aria of the Ragged Man" on YouTube.)

Political opera—by which one almost invariably means politics of the near- to far-left varieties, right-wing classical composers being an elusive species—faces an obvious paradox. Opera houses draw a diverse public, but for financial support they lean heavily on mega-wealthy corporations and executives, whose labor practices and moral self-justifications would elicit new blasts of invective from the likes of Brecht and Steinbeck. Brecht wanted to use opera as a kind of Trojan horse, to enter the palaces of the upper classes and prick their conscience. Gordon, Korie, and the Minnesota Opera administration seem to have had a similar purpose in mind, smuggling a fairly savage attack on corporate indifference into yet another musicalization of a familiar book. Chances are that no minds or hearts will be changed, but you have to admire the brass of a composer who makes the line "It's not my fault" a four-note echo of Beethoven's Fifth. ♦

AT THE MUSEUMS

HOOFING IT

George Stubbs at the Frick.

BY SIMON SCHAMA

Don't know your gaskin from your fetlock? Never mind, go to the Frick anyway for a show that in just seventeen paintings manages to convey the fabulous weirdness of the eighteenth-century English artist George Stubbs.

Stubbs has been known since his own day as a horse painter, the greatest ever. He wore the honor like a hair shirt, aware that it was what had brought him success with the horsy British aristocracy, and yet wanting desperately to be taken seriously as a history painter. But you look at his efforts in that genre and find yourself saying, inevitably, "Aren't the horses good?" Excluded from the founding fellowship of the Royal Academy, Stubbs smarted at being treated as the master of a low genre, more like a jockey or a stud groom, which is perhaps why he paints such figures in attitudes of lordly grandeur.

Yet his art was always more than a day at the races. Stubbs, born in 1724, emerged from provincial obscurity in the seventeen-sixties, just when the British Empire was feeling its oats, on the eve of the American Inconvenience. Loaded with money from land and trade, the Whig aristocracy in the first decade of George III's reign was politically powerful and culturally ravenous. In truth, these nobles had been lording it only since the revolution of 1688, and, like all relatively new élites, had transferred their defensive grandeur into an obsession with pedigree and bloodlines. Not their own (for they were happy to hybridize their dynasties with the moneyed) but those of their animals, especially the four-footed friends whom they raced and on whom they wagered with abandon, betting thousands of pounds on a single event. They seldom went to war anymore; their racers—bred out of the great trinity of sires the Godolphin Arabian, the Byerley Turk, and the Darley Arabian—did combat for them.

But the artists available to represent these trophy steeds were dim amateurs, famously dissolute loungers at the track. What the aristocrats wanted was a painter who could make their horses, and their dogs and cattle, heroic. Stubbs understood the craving and was able to service it with spectacular skill. He got the swagger, and the way it was a kind of patrimony for this generation, descending from the milords to anyone in their aura. In one of the little marvels of the Frick show, the Smiths, father and son, professional huntsmen, wear that air of effortless superiority, the contained smirk of being British in the seventeen-seventies. "The Lincolnshire Ox" is, likewise, a big brag in a small frame. The ox's owner, John Gibbon, had won the three-thousand-pound, six-foot-four bovine in a cockfight bet, and he put it on show in Hyde Park, where customers forked over a shilling to ogle the behemoth. Stubbs obliged his patron by painting the perfect cock-and-bull pitch: Gibbon himself, his hucksterish self-congratulation given away in the prissily dressed bangs; Old Supersize; and the strutting black-and-white gamecock that had made Gibbon's fortune. The year is 1790. Stubbs's acquaintance Edmund Burke is getting lathered up about events occurring on the wrong side of the Channel. But this is the least defensive emblem of John Bull imaginable: hulking, shaggy, packed with fat and blood.

Stubbs isn't just a glamorist of Georgian muscle or an innocent transcriber of the sporting and hunting life. His naturalism is both more and less than meets the eye. His shiny exhibits are sweaty with animal vitality (you can almost inhale the aroma of damp straw and steaming dung), but also strangely caught in a frozen social ballet, even when, ostensibly, they're pitchforking hay or watching a foxhound finish off a stag. Everything and everyone seems in suspended animation (and this may account for Stubbs's long absence from the pantheon of British art), trapped, rather than liberated, by the paint.

The glittering creepiness, the worrying sense of life going on somewhere beneath the casing of skin, hide, and fur, is what gives Stubbs his modern appeal. So it's no surprise to learn that his own life was framed by the exacting discipline of anatomical dissection. His father, a Liverpool currier, wanted young George to follow him as a shaver and dresser of fine hides. When he died, George went off to work in the studio of a local artist, but his muse was always fruitfully morbid. In York, he illustrated an obstetrician's text, ordering a grave to be robbed so that he might study the uterus of a woman who had recently died in childbirth. His next apprenticeship was the obligatory trip to the antique marbles. His first biographer, Ozias Humphry, insisted that, unlike the gang of English and Scots artists working around the Piazza di Spagna, in Rome, Stubbs was left cold by classical statuary. But the friezelike deployment of profiled figures in shallow space that characterizes so many of his pictures belies that indifference; he clearly did catch a bad case of Art. The question—perhaps posed as he looked up at the equestrian Marcus Aurelius on the Campidoglio—was how to bring it to the English counties.

The answer was heretical: by dismounting the Emperor and concentrating on the steed—by making the horse the hero. Back in England, he took himself and his mistress off to a cottage in the Lincolnshire village of Horkstow. There he proceeded to bleed selected horses to death from the jugular. He then injected the cadavers with warm tallow to preserve the form of pulsing veins and arteries (hence their perfect rendering in his paintings). Finally, he suspended them in a standing or trotting pose from a contraption of hooks and tackles bolted to the ceiling and, amid the vile slop and stench, worked his way through the flayed carcass, muscle by muscle, bone by bone. It took eleven weeks to get through a single horse, and there were many of them.

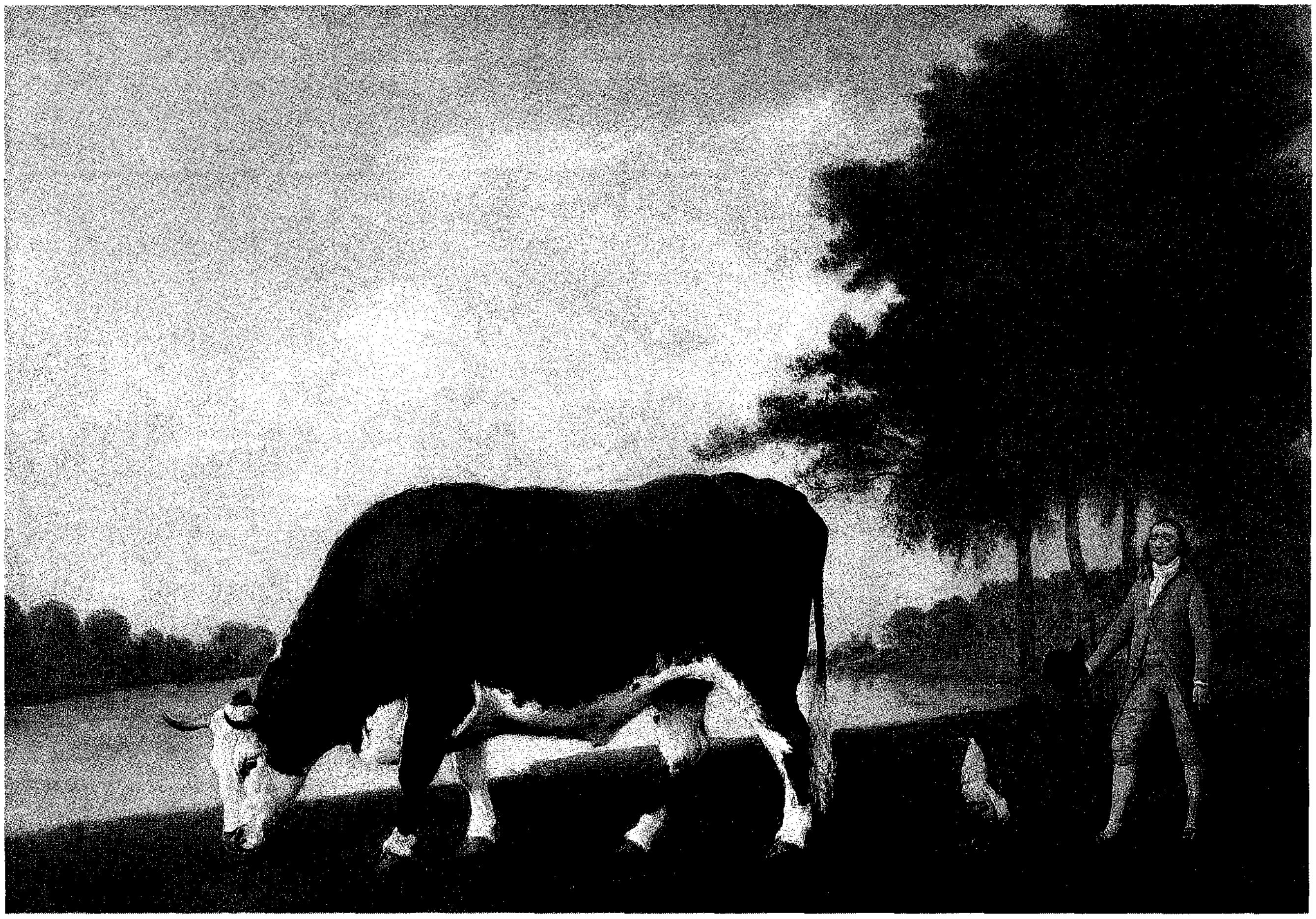
The result, "Anatomy of the Horse," made Stubbs's fame and fortune. On the strength of the spectacular drawings, circulating in London, Stubbs became one of the most sought-after artists in England. Among his earliest patrons were young men who claimed scientific as well as aesthetic cultivation: the Duke of Richmond was a Fellow of the Royal Society; the Marquess of Rockingham had Burke for his secretary, and took a keen interest in metallurgy and mining.

It was for Rockingham that Stubbs painted the astounding, life-size "Whistlejacket," the stallion made into an "equine nude," without rider, landscape, or any field of depth, an apparition of literally unbridled energy, rearing up in honey-colored limitless space. The *levade*, the lifted front legs, was characteristic of royal equestrian portraits, designed to represent the sovereign mastering the great mount with a single hand on the reins. But Rockingham—who had a difficult relationship with George III—decided to omit the royal rider and display his racer as an emblem of pure animal power. The picture threw people into swoons of amazement and rapidly generated its own lore; the actual Whistlejacket was said to have been so aroused by the likeness that he bucked and kicked at it.

"Whistlejacket" was, presumably, too big for the Frick, which, understandably, has gone for chamber pictures that could be comfortably installed in its exhibition space. Handsome as much of the installation is, it risks deadening the explosive impact of Stubbs's greatest work in a concentration of ingratiating charm. Rockingham's revolutionary taste is represented in "Mares and Foals" (1763-68), a mustering of horses, without masters or grooms, in which the heads of the young are buried beneath the bellies of their dams, but which turns into a shameless exercise in sentimental lactation, the domestic virtue of the herd on display for an age besotted with the subject. That fatal charm pervades the show like Stubbs's warm tallow, with innocuous zoological amusements on the walls: the Duke of Richmond's bull moose; a monkey with peaches; the winsome chorus line of foxhounds, dog, bitch, dog, bitch, dog.

Every so often, there is a showstopper posing as a mind-teaser. At first, "Haymakers" and "Reapers," both from 1785, seem exemplary in their clear-eyed repudiation of pastoral poesy: no china-doll shepherdesses, no curly-haired swains. Instead, Stubbs offers real laborers, the cart horse with its hoofs deep in hay, the reapers reaping beneath the beady-eyed gaze of a mounted overseer. But the toilers' bodies, faces, and dress are implausibly free of rustic grime, and the figures are choreographed as if in some bucolic minuet. It's a feel-good vision of the countryside, made to order for the gentry.

But there are places in the Frick show where the calculation falls away into a redeeming emptiness. One is a painting of a "Rubbing-Down House" (where horses were rubbed with straw after a warm gallop), on Newmarket Heath, a tract of bare racing grassland with few topographical niceties visible. Stubbs's minimalism, his resistance to the racecourse anecdotage that the English loved, his preference for solemnly profiled jockeys, genteel or plebeian, for mounts with names like Snap, Eclipse, Mambrino, has something of the elemental that did not reappear until Picasso's "Boy Leading a Horse," more than a century later. "The Rubbing-Down House" painting rubs out even that, however, leaving us with just the sparest of visual utterances: the damp East Anglian chill enveloping the mournful heathland. It's this erasure, for once, of the cheap enchantments of art that makes Stubbs so bravely and unforgettably peculiar. ♦



In pictures like "The Lincolnshire Ox," the subjects exude animal vitality yet can seem trapped, instead of liberated, by the paint.

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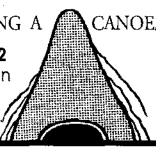
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THE THEATRE

TRAPPED IN TIME

The ghost worlds of J. M. Barrie and Tom Stoppard.

BY JOHN LAHR

Can we agree that we're all haunted? The ghost world is part of our world. We carry within us the good and the bad, the spoken and the unspoken imperatives of our missing loved ones. As children, we are dreamed up by our parents; as adults, when our parents die we dream them up in turn. Conversations rarely stop at the grave. So, when we encounter ghosts onstage, they both terrify and compel us; within their trapped energy is an echo of our own unresolved losses. Ghosts must be banished, in order to get rid of their aggression toward the living and our aggression toward them for having left us. In the theatre, ghosts are traditionally agents either of tragic provocation (the ghost of Hamlet's father) or of comic persecution (Elvira in Noël Coward's "Blithe Spirit"); in Tina Landau's clever and stimulating revival of J. M. Barrie's 1920 play "Mary Rose" (at the Vineyard), however, the ghost turns out to be a catalyst for autobiographical repair.

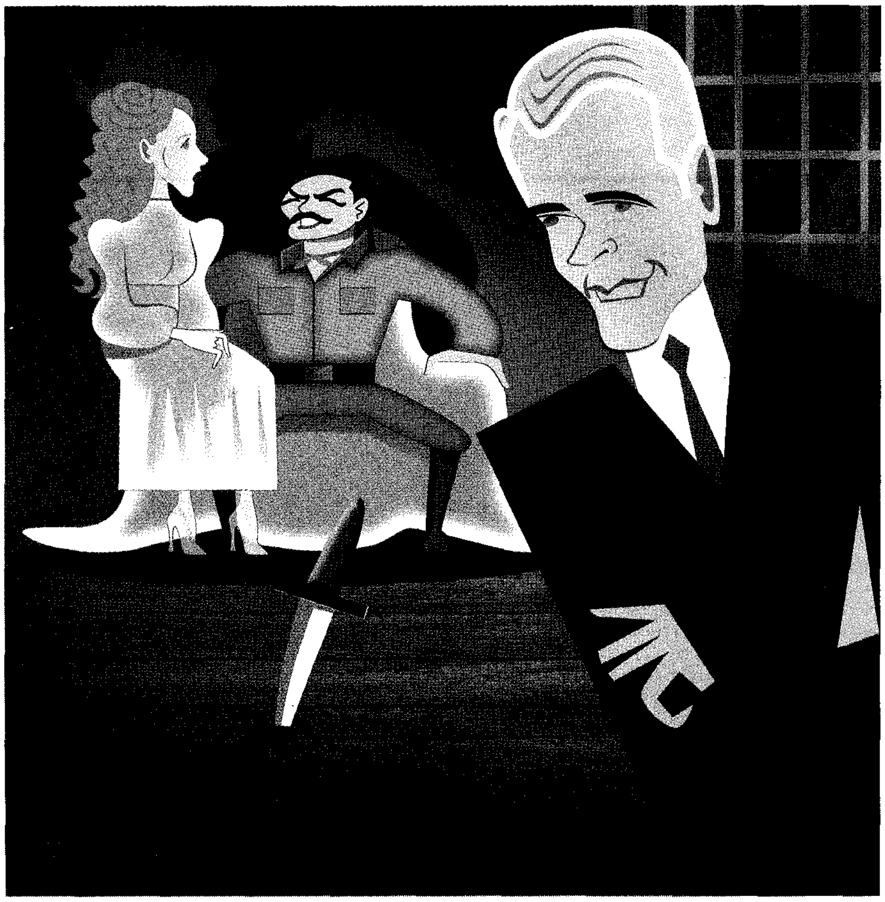
At first sighting, the jejune, elusive Mary Rose Morland (Paige Howard) is clearly one of Barrie's charming embodiments of arrested development. She climbs an apple tree, then clambers through a window into her mother's drawing room. Mary Rose is not an eight-year-old tomboy but a woman-child of eighteen, who is about to announce her engagement. "I'm hiding," she tells her father. "I'm not sure whom I'm hiding from. From myself, I think." This speech, both knowing and unknowing, gives Barrie's game away; his heroine doesn't want to grow up. Nor do her cosseting, sentimental parents really want her to. Even after her marriage, she and her husband, Simon (Darren Goldstein), live with her family. The Morlands infantilize their daughter both in speech—she is her father's "hoyden" or "gosling"—and in action. When she was eleven, on a trip to the Outer Hebrides, she disappeared for twenty days, a period of which she has no memory. "We never told her; she doesn't know now," Mrs. Morland tells Simon. The parents won't let their daughter experience loss or help her to think through it. No wonder she is stuck.

Inevitably, when Mary Rose eventually returns to the Hebrides with her husband, she disappears again, this time for twenty-five years. The netherworld she inhabits during that time is a paradigm of Barrie's literary process, which he called "playing hide-and-seek with angels": a sort of heavenly place that "kills time" and in which the unreal becomes real. ("Lovely, lovely, lovely" is how Mary Rose later describes it.) But, when she finally returns to the living, her family has aged beyond recognition, and her son, Harry, who was nearly three when she disappeared, is gone.

"The only ghosts, I believe, who creep into this world, are dead young mothers, returned to see how their children fare," Barrie wrote. He knew, from experience, that a mother could be both alive and dead. In 1867, when he was six, his thirteen-year-old brother, David, was killed in a skating accident. Barrie's mother, Margaret, took to her bed and became a ghostly presence, who was both there and not there for her little boy. "Do you mind nothing about me?" Barrie recalled asking her as he sat on her bed, in his idealizing memoir, "Margaret Ogilvy." To revive his mother, Barrie even dressed up as David and tried to imitate David's whistle. (He also is said to have stopped growing at the age at which his brother died, and was only five feet tall.) "She lived twenty-nine years after his death," Barrie wrote of his mother. "But I had not made her forget the bit of her that was dead. . . . In those nine-and-twenty years he was not removed one day farther from her. Many a time she fell asleep speaking to him, and even while she slept her lips moved and she smiled as if he had come back to her, and when she woke he might vanish so suddenly that she started up bewildered and looked about her, and then said slowly 'My David's dead.'" In life, Barrie could not heal his haunted mother or reclaim her; in "Mary Rose," written fifteen years after "Peter Pan," when Barrie was almost sixty, he does both. In the play, Harry (Richard Short), who left home at the age of twelve to go to sea, returns as an adult to release her ghost from its restless tribulation. "Being a ghost is worse than seeing them," he tells his mother when they confront each other at the finale.

For this production, Landau has taken Barrie's sometimes elaborate stage directions and turned them into a character, the Narrator (Keir Dullea). This trope adds visual and intellectual strength to the delicate play. The Narrator is the first person we see, through the diaphanous curtains of James Schuette's subtle set, with its torn wallpaper signalling both physical and psychological scars; he is "remembering"—the play turns out to be a flashback within a flashback. Hiding in a corner of the parlor, lurking on the threshold, or looking on from the front of the stage, the Narrator haunts the story, as its ghost haunts both the characters and us, and the authority and eloquence of his voice lend an eerie credibility to the unfathomable.

When Harry first returns to the haunted family home, he's dressed in a First World War uniform; he takes a dagger from his belt and sticks it mysteriously into the floorboards. "It's not a knife, it's a visiting card," he tells the housekeeper, who goes to make him some tea. The knife augurs some kind of battle. While Harry waits for his tea, the play happens; he imagines Mary Rose's entire story. When her ghost is finally coaxed into view, the knife disappears. Harry, who doesn't seem at all scared, demands that she return it; she hands it over. There is no contention, no struggle, and, finally, no drama. Barrie didn't want to face his own aggression in life; he can't face it in theatre, either. Here, with the empathic power of his imagination, Harry, whose mother never actually recognizes him, nonetheless liberates her from woe and engineers a kind of salvation for them both. The psychological progress—this is commercial entertainment, after all—is strangely painless, a fairy tale of deliverance, mostly Barrie's own. The last line of this production is Barrie's final stage direction, "Harry hears nothing but he knows somehow a prayer has been answered"; that prayer was Barrie's.


Haunted house: Paige Howard, Richard Short, and Keir Dullea in "Mary Rose."

ROBERT RISKO

At the opening of Tom Stoppard's "Salvage" (at the Vivian Beaumont), the third and weakest part of his epic pageant about the nineteenth-century Russian intellectuals who hatched the notion of revolution, Alexander Herzen (Brían F. O'Byrne) sits in an armchair, suspended in tempest-tossed space, clutching the glove of his dead son. He, too, is haunted. Exiled in London, where he is united with his friend Nicholas Ogarev (Josh Hamilton), Herzen launches *The Bell*, a muckraking paper, which taunts his motherland with censored news and radical argument, until serfdom is finally abolished, in 1861. The historical trajectory of the tale is long; Stoppard's characterization, however, is shorthand. Herzen's writing is inflammatory; the acting style is declamatory. In the Herzen household, political liberation is matched by sexual liberation. (Ogarev's hysterical wife, Natasha, bears Herzen three children.)

Stoppard, who adopts a sort of pointillist approach to his characters, can't find a way to manufacture sweep and depth. When you're skating on thin ice, your safety lies in speed; the director, Jack O'Brien, understands this and tells the story at spectacular full throttle. He ramps up the revolve, stokes the smoke machine, and gets the scrims flying. His production is gorgeous and dynamic; he invests the trilogy with a passion that the original production, at London's National Theatre, lacked. If the Lincoln Center spectacle looks at times like a musical—for instance, in the playful, stylized way that the radical émigrés announce themselves to the audience—well, in a sense it is: Stoppard is dealing here with the music of time. Through all the expositional hubbub—"I see my countryman over there, that swindler Marx!"—his urbane, reflective, skeptical voice sometimes rings true and clear. "History has no purpose!" Herzen says. "It takes wit and courage to make our way while our way is making us, with no consolation to count on but art and the summer lightning of personal happiness." ♦

THE CURRENT CINEMA

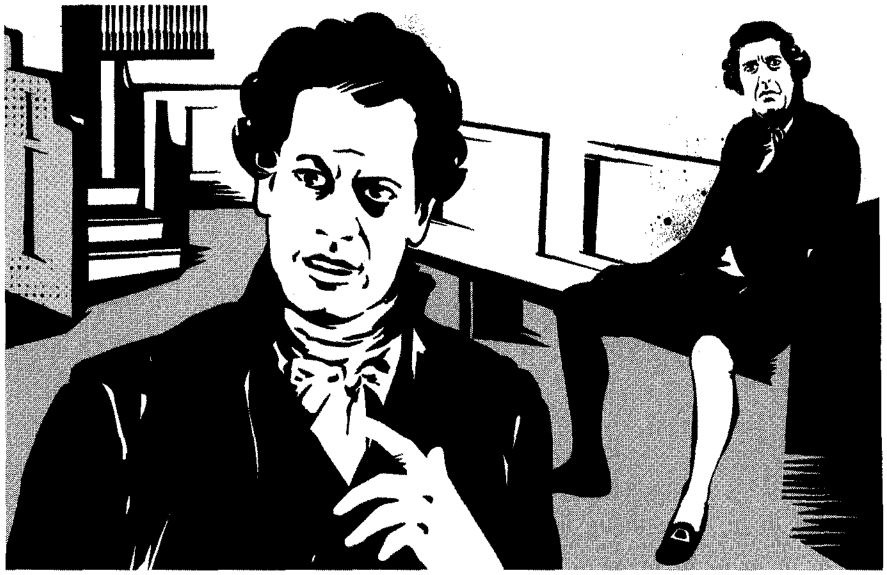
FREE SPIRITS

"Amazing Grace."

BY DAVID DENBY

"Amazing Grace," a vibrant historical epic about the ending of the slave trade in the British Empire, offers what might be called an ideal of virile ethical activity. William Wilberforce (Ioan Gruffudd), the son of a wealthy merchant, enters the House of Commons in 1780, when he is all of twenty-one years old; his college friend William Pitt the Younger (Benedict Cumberbach), the son of the former Prime Minister, also twenty-one, enters the Commons the following year. An observer watching them race around a country estate together might think they are planning some prank, like filling the decanters in the Commons waiting rooms with vinegar. They are actually planning the moral reform of the Empire. In an early scene, Pitt, suppressing a grin, advises Wilberforce of his intention to become Prime Minister immediately, which he does, at the age of twenty-four, in 1783. The friends, too young to be abashed by their own presumption, take on the slave-trade interests—a good part of the upper class, which was making a fortune from it—as a kind of consecrated adventure. Written by Steven Knight ("Dirty Pretty Things") and directed by the veteran Michael Apted, the movie is upbeat in tone, conventional in form, and often reminiscent of earlier inspirational pictures about heroes who overcome defeat and go on fighting against impossible odds. Yet, as square as this movie is, it has been made with eloquence and jaunty high spirits, and it tells a good story that is virtually unknown here.

If Americans recognize the name Wilberforce at all, they are probably thinking of Samuel Wilberforce, the bishop who was on the wrong side of the greatest intellectual issue of the nineteenth century. Bishop Samuel Wilberforce, taking on Darwin's defender Thomas Henry Huxley in 1860, the year after the publication of "On the Origin of Species," warned of the danger that scientific "errors" posed to God's glory and to human dignity. The Bishop's father, William, was also a man who drew on religious definitions of dignity. If this film has it right, the father was one of the most brilliant and persuasive men of his time—and a fighter who, among other things, triumphed over the worst stomach ache in movie history. Wilberforce had colitis, and, as played by the excellent Welsh actor Ioan Gruffudd, he is forever clutching his midsection and grimacing, or falling to the floor in agony, only to rise to his feet and bash the M.P.s allied with the plantation owners and slave traders one more time. Wilberforce may have thought that God was punishing him for his failure to end the slave trade: his shame is right there in his gut. In the end, intestinal fortitude wins out. The act banning the slave trade was passed two hundred years ago this month.



Ioan Gruffudd and Ciarán Hinds in a movie about Britain's abolitionist movement.

ULLA PUGGAARD

The opening scenes catch Wilberforce in 1797, when the cause is at a low ebb. His anti-slavery bill, introduced every year, is easily defeated, and Wilberforce is getting rained on—stinging cold downpours, of the type much favored by movie directors, douse his suffering body whenever he goes out. Hooked on laudanum (i.e., opium), the fashionable painkiller of the day, shaky and disgusted, he is saved by the attentions of Barbara Spooner (Romola Garai), a Gainsborough beauty with a luxuriant pile of red hair and a creamy bosom. Through one long night, in front of a fire, he recounts to her the history of the abolitionist movement. Having one character narrate a story to an ardent and beautiful soul mate is a tame and cozy device, but what we see is fascinating. Wilberforce, who often thought of going into the evangelical church, was recruited to the abolitionist cause in the seventeen-eighties by a group of Quakers and dissidents, including Oloudah Equiano (Youssou N'Dour), an ex-slave who wrote a widely read autobiography detailing the horrors of the Middle Passage across the Atlantic, and Thomas Clarkson (Rufus Sewell), a radical who gathered vast amounts of information about the slave trade. When Wilberforce needs a fresh layer of moral armor, he goes to see John Newton (Albert Finney), a former slave-ship captain, who, mortified by his career as a sinner, wrote the lyrics to the hymn "Amazing Grace," in the seventeen-sixties. By the seventeen-eighties, Newton was living as a penitent and a monk in a small Anglican church in London. Albert Finney, now seventy, has become as fearsome as an ancient whale—a massive body, with a gaping mouth, bulging eyes, and a corrosive voice. It's only a small role, but Finney takes Newton's sense of sin beyond hamming and into anguish.

Michael Apted is perhaps best known for his work on the biographical documentary series that began with "Seven Up!" (1964) and has been followed by six septennial installments, but he has made some lovely feature films, including "Agatha" (1979) and the Loretta Lynn biopic, "Coal Miner's Daughter" (1980). As a feature-film director, he has always had a gentle touch—tactful, a little restrained. For "Amazing Grace," he and the cinematographer Remi Adefarasin work in a slightly pale color scheme, as if England had been redrawn in pastels. The picture moves swiftly, but it's not madly overdynamized, as most big movies now are. Wilberforce may attack the complacency of the rich who refuse to hear about the suffering of the slaves, but Apted is candid enough to demonstrate that the privileges of wealth can be delightful: now and then, Wilberforce retreats to an estate in Yorkshire, where he lies on the grass in ecstatic communion with nature, and entertains the local poor in his fancy dining room.

One of the flourishes of the British temperament that are most enchanting to Americans is the alternation, among the brightest spirits, of seriousness and wit. The parliamentary debates, as shaped by Steven Knight, leap from noble declamation to taunting one-upmanship and back again. At such moments, the movie offers a dream of perfect articulateness—superbly trained actors delivering expertly phrased remarks with ease and force. Ioan Gruffudd has a serious brow, a wide smile, and romantically disordered locks, and, in the parliamentary scenes, he plants his feet and lets his voice ring out. Glowering, dark-eyed Ciarán Hinds is on hand as his surly opponent, Lord Tarleton, the chief defender of the slave-trading interests, and the great Michael Gambon, with his richly musical baritone, wafts his bulk through the movie as the Whig politician Charles James Fox, who becomes an influential supporter of the abolitionists. In this country, we have great actors, but not *these* kinds of great actors—men and women who can play historical figures and hold to formal syntax without losing their sense of play. Our founding crew of statesmen and intellectuals were no less gifted than Pitt and Wilberforce, but, despite an endless number of best-selling books about them, there isn't a single good movie devoted to their efforts. At this point, no one can look at an American in a powdered wig without laughing. Popular culture and the democratization of taste and style have made our history irredeemable as entertainment—which is a loss, though I don't suppose anyone will do much about it. ♦

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VOLUME LXXXIII, NO. 2, March 5, 2007. THE NEW YORKER (ISSN 0028792X) is published weekly (except for five combined issues: February 19 & 26, June 11 & 18, July 9 & 16, September 3 & 10, and December 24 & 31) by Condé Nast Publications, which is a division of Advance Magazine Publishers Inc. PRINCIPAL OFFICE: The Condé Nast Building, 4 Times Square, New York, NY 10036. Louis Cona, vice-president and publisher; Jamie Engel, associate publisher; Alatia Bradley, advertising director; Karen Quinn-Panzer, advertising director; Melissa McCarthy Strome, advertising director; Judy Safir, director of finance and business operations; Daniella Wells, executive director marketing and strategic planning; Janine Silvera, executive director of creative services; Jacqueline Cinguina, director of integrated marketing; Steve Porter, creative director/advertising; Ellen Reid, creative services director; Lynn Oberlander, general counsel. Condé Nast Publications: S. I. Newhouse, Jr., chairman; Charles H. Townsend, president and C.E.O.; John W. Bellando, executive vice-president and C.O.O.; Debi Chirichella Sabino, senior vice-president and C.F.O.; Jill Bright, executive vice-president/human resources. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY, and at additional mailing offices. Canada Post Publications Mail Agreement No. 40644503. Canadian Goods and Services Tax Registration No. 123242885-RT0001. Canada Post: return undeliverable Canadian addresses to P.O. Box 874, Station Main, Markham, ON L3P 8L4.

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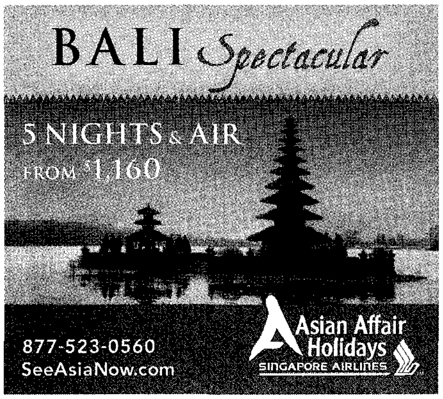

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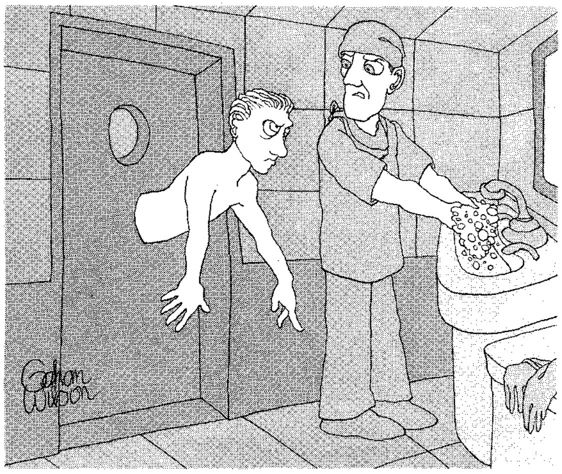
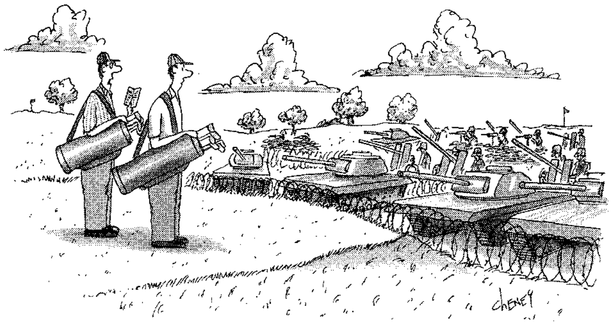
CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Michael Maslin, must be received by Sunday, March 4th. Finalists in the February 12th contest appear below; go online to vote. We will announce the winner, along with the finalists in this week's contest, in the March 19th issue. The winner will be given a signed print of the cartoon. Any U.S. resident age eighteen or over can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit www.newyorker.com/captioncontest.

THE WINNING CAPTION



"So sue me."
Daniel Crossen, Los Angeles, Calif.



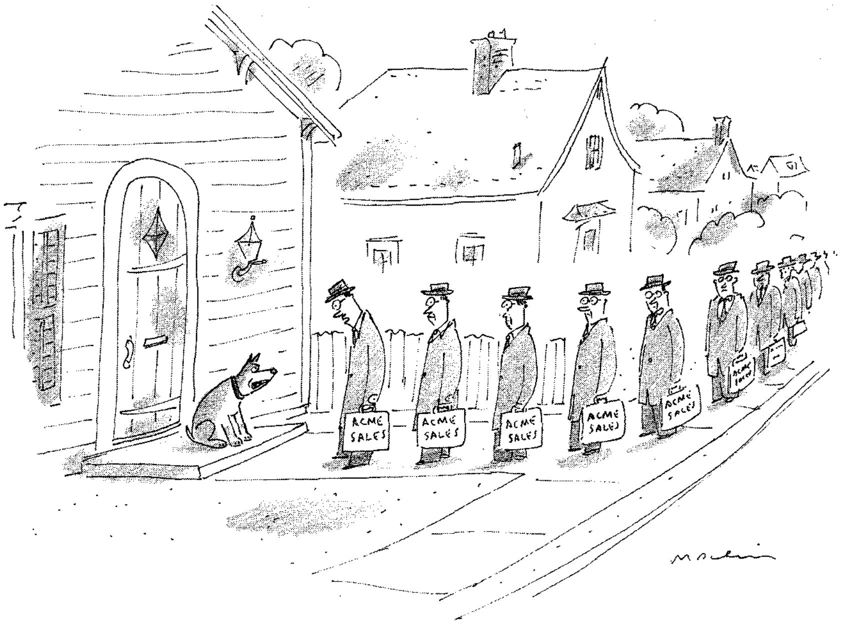
THE FINALISTS

"If we truly believe in golf, I don't think we have much of a choice."
Jonathan Steinhoff, Burbank, Calif.

"I support our troops as much as the next guy, but do we have to let them play through?"
Charlie Freund, Glendale, Calif.

"Tom, I think you should stop shouting 'Bombs away!' every time you drive the ball."
Kiran Ghia, Brookline, Mass.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



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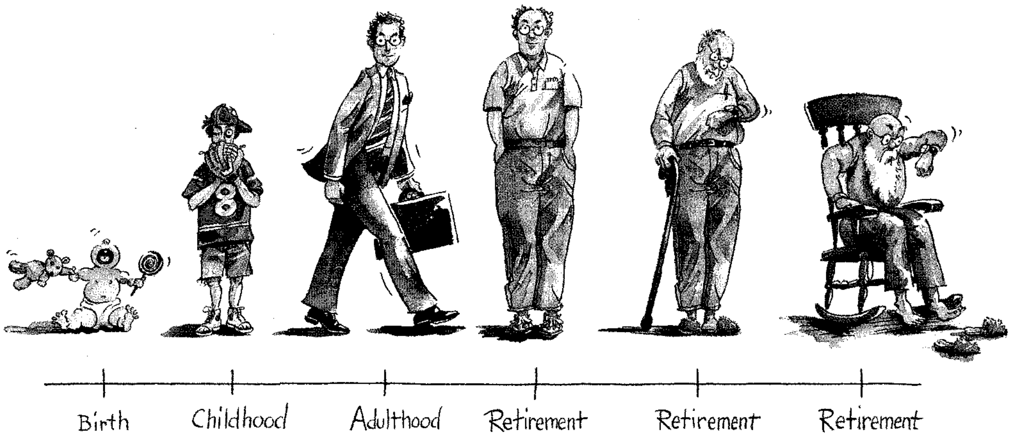

Average life expectancy in the U.S. has risen to an all-time high. Great news, except that the amount of money people put away for retirement isn't rising at all. How is our nation going to make sure its citizens have the money to retire? Allstate has a few ideas:

1. EXAMINE SOCIAL SECURITY

Americans will not be able to rely solely on Social Security for a comfortable retirement. In the future, it's projected to cover an increasingly smaller percentage of the average retirement. There's debate as to whether it should be repaired or replaced. But what's clear is we need to reform Social Security *now*.

2. BOOST RETIREMENT PLAN ENROLLMENT

Companies should continue looking for ways to encourage employee participation in 401(k) plans. One proven method to increase retirement savings is through company matches. Another is automatic enrollment—employees are signed up for savings plans when they join the company, unless they specifically opt out.

3. INCREASE PERSONAL SAVINGS

Ultimately, everyone is responsible for their own retirement. It's why we support laws that reward people for saving. Tax-advantaged savings vehicles, like annuities and IRAs, are two examples of products that can help allay Baby Boomers' biggest fear: living to see the well run dry.

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